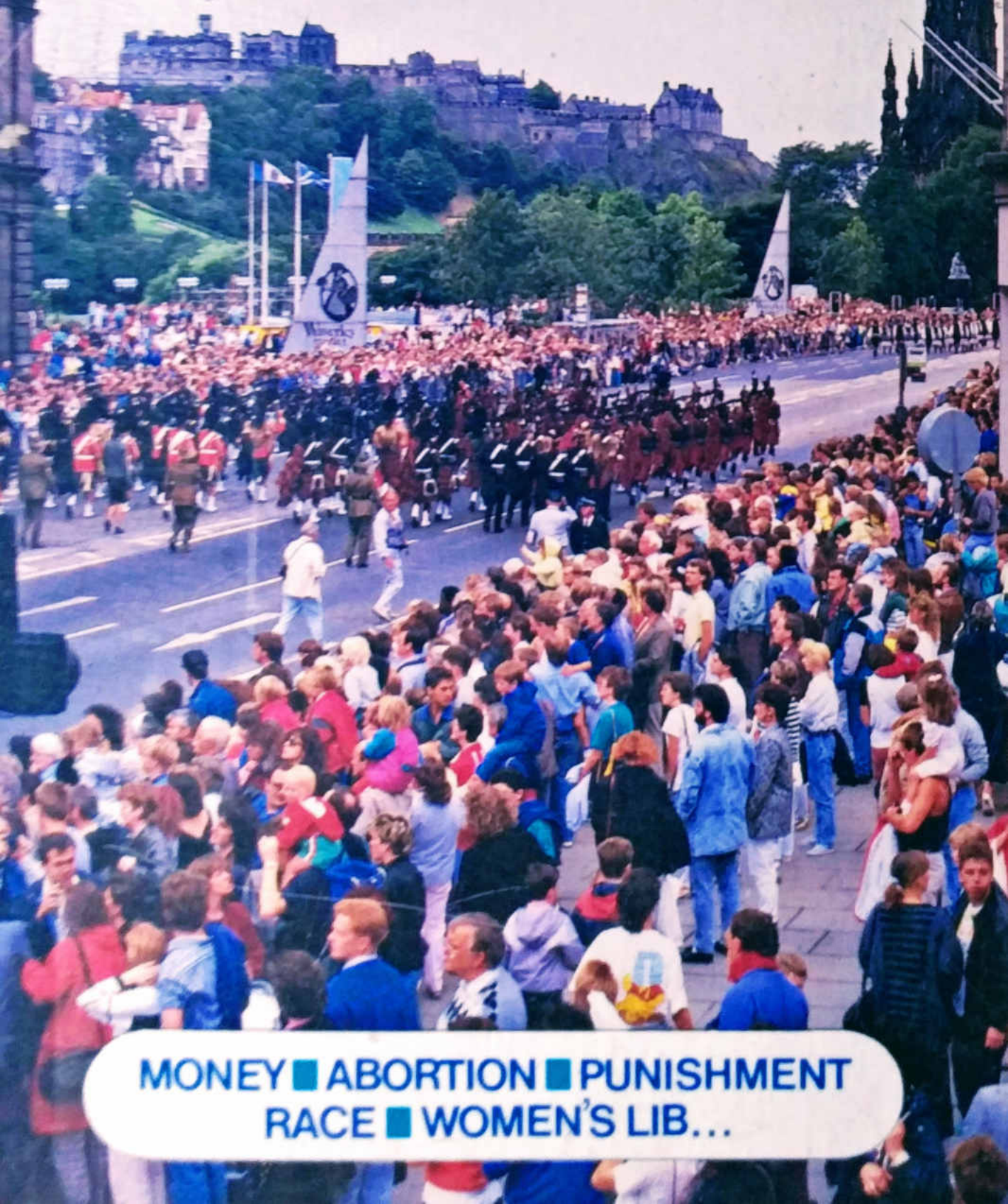


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God's Word on Present Issues

DAVID BROUGHTON KNOX



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*God's Word on
Present Issues*

DAVID BROUGHTON KNOX

T. Paul Probst

THE BANNER OF TRUTH TRUST

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Foreword

'Do you think you'll go to heaven when you die?' I had come to be interviewed by Dr Broughton Knox towards the end of 1961, a hopeful applicant for acceptance at Moore Theological College in Sydney as a theological student and future ordinand. In the course of that interview, Broughton Knox asked me that question about going to heaven. My own personal grapevine had already warned me that Dr Knox was highly likely to ask tricky and unpredictable questions, so rather than give a reply to what was, essentially, an enquiry as to my conversion and assurance of salvation, I gave a guarded and somewhat fatuous answer. That question was a true indication of Broughton Knox's commitment to the gospel of Christ. Early in his life he had been a proponent of supernatural religion and a contender for the truth of that gospel which is 'the power of God unto salvation to all who believe', and was insistent that an emphasis upon new birth and true assurance should be the characteristics of all who sought the path to the ordained ministry in the Anglican Diocese of Sydney and, indeed, of all who sought training at Moore College for any reason.

David Broughton Knox was the product of a godly home, the son of an Anglican minister of Northern Ireland stock. In 1939, as a young graduate of the University of Sydney, he went to England and began theological studies at the London College of Divinity. After ministering in a Cambridge parish, he entered service as a chaplain with the Royal Navy Volunteer Reserve and subsequently participated in the D-Day Operation Overlord in 1944. His years in London and Cambridge enabled him to share actively in

the expansion of the Inter-Varsity Fellowship and to make contact with many Christian leaders.

In the early 1950s he was a lecturer in New Testament at Wycliffe Hall, Oxford. In 1953 that university awarded him its D.Phil. for his thesis, *The Doctrine of Faith in the Reign of Henry VIII*.

Dr Knox's active association with Moore College for over 40 years opened a ministry which went far beyond the confines of the College and, indeed, far beyond the Anglican Church in Sydney. He was appointed to the faculty of Moore College in 1947 and became principal in 1959. This position he held until his retirement in 1985. Thereafter in semi-retirement he continued to lecture in doctrine until 1988. It was then that he answered an invitation from the Church of England in South Africa to found a theological college in Cape Town and George Whitefield College began its courses in 1989 under his principalship.

During his years at Moore College, Broughton Knox had a strong and pervasive influence in maintaining and further developing the evangelical character of the Anglican Diocese of Sydney. His unshakeable belief in the divine authority and inspiration of Scripture and his vigorous defence of the doctrines of grace were unswerving. But his dogged insistence on treating the text of the Bible as the revealed and authoritative word of the living God did not always win friends, especially within the ecclesiastical institution or on the floor of synods. Time and again his biblical logic and exegetical skills demolished the arguments of those who sought to take a lesser view of Scripture.

David Broughton Knox could never be neatly categorised as holding this or that traditional theological position. He disdains all labels, preferring only the general appellation 'evangelical' – i.e., a believer in the gospel of the cross and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. He is at once in fellowship with anyone, of any denomination, who seriously

called Jesus Christ 'Lord' and who believed and loved the gospel.

In the lecture room Dr Knox often appeared to be a little vague, but this was to encourage students to contest the points he made. Then, immediately, all traces of vagueness disappeared; his eyes would flash and the apologist *par excellence* was in full flight.

On his own admission not an outstanding preacher, Broughton Knox nevertheless preached sermons of great quality, sermons which expounded the text and brought out treasures old and new. This present work mostly comprises an edited version of broadcasts he made in Sydney in a weekly series entitled *The Christian Faith*. This radio programme had been commenced by T. C. Hammond in the 1930s when he was principal of Moore College.

It is a privilege to have been invited to contribute this foreword. My wife and I owe a great deal to a friendship of more than 25 years with Broughton and his wife Ailsa. His clarity of mind and forceful arguments are always part of fellowship with them. These were buttressed by a prodigious knowledge of God's Word inculcated by his mother and father and a wide circle of deeply committed Christian relatives from early childhood. This knowledge he sought always to pass on to his family, especially his six children. He saw the church as an extension of the home and pointed out the irrelevance of public worship for children if they only shared it with comparative strangers and did not also know worship within the intimacy of the family circle.

It should be remembered that this book, notable for the freshness of its application of Scripture to contemporary issues, was for the most part originally given in the form of radio addresses. For help in their preparation for publication we are indebted to Mrs Betsy Taylor and Mrs Margaret Kirton.

It is my prayer that many readers who have not had the

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opportunity of appreciating Broughton Knox's ministry in person will be able to do so by means of this volume.

DENIS RYAN

Sydney, June, 1989

1

The Battle for the Mind

Over one hundred years ago the Supreme Court of the United States declared:

The foundation of a republic is the virtue of its citizens. As the foundation is undermined the structure is weakened; where it is destroyed the fabric must fall.

Today those of us who live in countries where Christian values once formed the outward structures by which community life was held together can see the truth of this prophecy. A declension in morals has been followed by an inevitable fall in public virtue. Nations, once both Christian and Protestant, have now ceased to be Christian communities.

There are several reasons for this. Materialism and the pursuit of possessions have, of course, always been with us, but today have become an absorbing interest to the whole community because of the greater possibility of attainment of affluence. It is as true today as it was in Jesus' time that you cannot serve God and mammon.

The characteristic of modern society is that it lives only in the present. There has always been a tendency in human nature to do this, witness the ancient motto, 'Let us eat, drink and be merry for tomorrow we die'; but the tendency to live only for the present is greatly strengthened these days by certain ideas which are now commonly accepted as truths.

And it is in terms of the mind, ultimately, that human behaviour has to be explained for 'As a man thinketh in his heart, so he is' (Prov 23:7).

One of these modern ideas is that there is no absolute standard of right or wrong. Therefore the only criterion for determining what is the right action is public opinion, the collective social conscience, as it were. Where this belief exists that the only law is to be that which follows public opinion, people will simply act according to their own hearts. The movement will always be downward so that, in the end, society becomes as corrupt as that of the ancient world, where there was little honesty or morality.

It is a great mistake to think that the law should simply enshrine public opinion. For if law is simply relative to culture then, of course, it is impossible for one culture to judge another; each has its own law and each law is justified by the public opinion of its own people. But when the crunch comes we know that this view of law is wrong. At the Nuremberg trials the Nazis said that their war crimes were simply carrying out the orders and laws of the government of Germany. But this rationale was seen to be false. The Nuremberg trials were based on the concept that there is a higher law by which the laws of Nazi Germany could be tested.

There is no reason why any law should be the law if it is based only on what the majority think at any particular time. Law, in this case, changes like a chameleon with public opinion and makes itself absurd. It may end up approving what it once punished. But there is a higher unchanging law, the word of the Creator, given to us in Scripture and confirmed in our hearts. In English-speaking countries the legal system was based upon the Bible until recent times. If such law is cut adrift from the higher law on which it was formed, and rests only on the sinking sands of public opinion, it will never be stable.

We all want to do what we like in moral matters but we find, within ourselves, a conscience which tugs us in the other direction. Sociologists put this down to our puritan inheritance and expect it to be expunged as time goes on. But conscience is not just due to our historical antecedents; it is part of human nature. Modesty, fidelity in marriage, repugnance to homosexuality, knowing that dirty jokes are wrong, are found in the makeup of every community, civilised or primitive, Christian or otherwise. This is the way God has made us. God is real and cannot be theorised out of existence; and human nature as created by God has certain unchangeable characteristics.

The permissive society sets itself to deny these things, but all that it does is introduce contradiction and tension into life. The permissive society will not last long. Either there will be a return to Christian values through putting God first, other people next and ourselves last; or the selfishness of the permissive society will increase so that, in the end, it will not be able to combine together to resist a dictatorship. Once a dictatorship, whether a party clique or an individual strong man, establishes itself, however permissive and licentious he may be himself, he will not permit other people to be permissive but will impose strict moral laws on society once again. But this time it will no longer be through common consent, as in a true Christian society; it will be through fear of the concentration camp or the firing squad.

Another powerful idea by which western civilisation has sought to insulate itself from God is the allegedly scientific view which purports to explain the world solely in terms of materialistic cause and effect. The theory of evolution has no need of any reference to God or his purposes. It eliminates the supernatural and substitutes the idea that everything has arrived in its present state by accident. It is an incredible theory when you think about it. It is against the evidence; for example, the evidence of the fossils which show that living

organisms are in their final form when they first appear. Evolution is also against common sense. Take the problem of the wing of a bird which is a very intricate aeronautical structure. It is effective only in its completed form; how can it get built up little bit by little bit by a staggering number of minute accidental variations, none of which is of any use until the final form is reached? The theory of evolution replaces the God who created the heavens and earth and everything we see around us with the theory that everything has been formed by accident. There is no evidence for evolution. However, it is widely believed and taught in school, just as idolatry was widely believed.

My purpose here is not so much to criticise evolution as a scientific theory as it is to show the effect of the idea as a substitute for belief in God. By excluding God from consideration in the ultimate origins and purpose of life the theory binds itself to all philosophies which teach that nothing exists except matter in motion and that life consists of expressing oneself in the present moment. Man's sinful concentration of his attention with the present and upon the accumulation of possessions is then excused. 'As a man thinks, so he is'.

The great issues of today will turn on the outcome of this battle of ideas. Already in our community, active agents are seeking to break down Christian values. There are the humanists who think all will be well with society so long as God is excluded. They live in a dream world. There are others whose object is to break down Christian values, whether values of sex and family or Christian institutions. Their object is to destroy all that binds the community together morally in order that they may bring in a revolution and set up their party dictatorship. The tragedy of western man is the extent to which he is a ready prey for falsehoods. The emptiness of modern western life and thought means that we have no principles nor determination by which to

resist the inroads of error. Man no longer believes anything with conviction and, as a consequence, his actions reflect this vacuum. There are no objectives or standards. Only men's desires remain constant and so they become enslaved to them.

Modern Christians are involved in the present predicament of unbelief. Our contemporaries do not believe, and, as a consequence, we are tempted to water down our own faith.

As a whole it is true to say that we Christians have relaxed our trust in God as Sovereign Lord, the Creator and Controller of all. We have relaxed our belief in God's holiness and so in his judgment, in spite of the fact that the Bible clearly says that God's judgment is so complete that even every idle word will come up for examination. We have relaxed our conviction on the centrality of Jesus Christ in history, Jesus who came from God to be our Saviour, who is the One through whom God has come into a relationship with mankind for the purpose of blessing and salvation. Our modern Christianity has become weak in faith and so is flabby in witness. It has no real message to the God-forgetting society around us.

The first thing that Christians should do is to make more time for earnest prayer for our community and for those who have positions of influence in it; for Christian ministers, for school teachers, for magistrates and judges, and for those in local and national government. Jesus told us to pray, first of all, that God's name might be hallowed and honoured, that God would be recognised as God, holy and sovereign. We should pray that his name will be hallowed in our own life and in the life of the community. Prayer to God is the ultimate weapon and we find it is the thing from which we are being constantly diverted, because we are engaged in a conflict with the powers of evil who are anxious to snatch this sword of prayer out of our hands. It is as true today as it was in Paul's time that Christians are engaged in a struggle, not

against flesh and blood but against spiritual forces of darkness.

Second, along with prayer, there must be positive witness. But if we are to witness effectively we must understand both what the Bible teaching is and how the modern situation lies. There must be a recovery of the truth that the Christian faith is a supernatural religion. We must renew our belief in God the almighty Creator and in the conviction that the events on which our salvation rests do not flow out from natural causes, but from the will of God.

We must believe, too, in a supernatural revelation. God has taken the initiative in making himself known, speaking first to Abraham, then to Moses, then to the prophets and, finally, in the Lord Jesus Christ and in the apostolic witness to him. We are not left to our own ideas about what God is like. He has spoken to us and this supernatural revelation made during the progress of history is brought to us through a supernatural book, the inerrant, infallible and completely reliable Word of God, the Bible. If God had not inspired the Holy Scriptures in this way, his revelation would have perished as a revelation in which we could put our implicit faith and hope as soon as the historical events faded from memory.

If we modern Christians are to be saved in the judgment which is inevitable we must deepen our faith in God as Sovereign Lord, in the holy God who judges who is yet the loving God who saves. We need to renew our faith in the purposes of God which find expression in Jesus Christ crucified, risen and coming again. God's purposes did not cease two thousand years ago at the resurrection but are still being completed. We need to renew our faith in Christ as Lord and in his coming kingdom.

This can only be as we recognise our need to deepen our own subjection to the Word of God in Holy Scripture; and as we understand that it is the failure to believe in the authority

of Scripture which has led to the now general failure of faith. The great truths and facts of revelation must be restored to the forefront of our minds. Then we will have something to say to our God-forgetting community. But let it be remembered, we cannot generate faith out of our own resources. Faith is a gift of God and we need to call upon him both for ourselves and others. Our heavenly Father remains sovereign over his world and his ears are open to the prayers of Christians, so that we should pray constantly that his Spirit may revive us, as in the time of the Reformation and the Puritan Movement of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and the Evangelical Movements of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. When his Spirit begins to work, then faith in his Word will become strong once more and the conscience will accept Scripture as the standard for the Christian's life.

Fellowship – The Purpose of Creation

Creation implies purpose because creating is a personal action. The dominant theory of explaining the world, namely evolution, excludes purpose from its purview and teaches that things are what they are by accidental mutations which happen to survive because of a pre-existent cause, namely the environment. The great error of evolution, which is universally taught in our schools, is that it contradicts a very large area of what we know to be true from experience, namely the existence of purpose. Evolution explains everything by the past but human actions are undertaken in view of the future.

Our actions look to the future, that is, we act with purpose. It is this which makes us persons and not mere things. Purpose is an aspect of the personal, while any mechanical explanation of the world (which evolution is) excludes the personal. It is very important for Christians to witness to the personal nature of our existence, to emphasise that it results from the personal will of God creating the world and that in creation and in his sovereign rule of the world he is fulfilling his purpose.

God's purpose for mankind is fellowship, that is to say a relationship of person with person on the basis of truth and justice, of love and mutual acceptance. This makes for happiness. It is a matter of observation that all pleasures are enhanced by fellowship and the greatest pleasures are only

experienced in fellowship, in true relationships between each other, where we accept one another into our personal life. It is God's purpose for us that we should be in fellowship with each other as persons and in fellowship with him who is the true Person. We ought consciously to adopt this aim in our own lives and seek to develop fellowship with other people in our own home or at work, or wherever our life may be placed.

There are some things which obviously make fellowship impossible. Selfishness, self-aggrandisement and unilateralism all destroy fellowship. Fellowship is also destroyed by untruthfulness of any sort, for if we put up a façade we cannot have fellowship. Any façade implies an untrue relationship – for example, if we try to impress people with our status symbols. So, too, it is impossible for us to have fellowship with God if we are disobedient, for the true relationship between the creature and his Creator involves gratitude and obedience.

We are God's creations, given all that we have through his goodwill, and we should respond to this relationship, firstly by gratitude and, secondly, by honouring him as God and obeying him. But human life is marked by disobedience to God. Naturally, therefore, there can be no fellowship till we repent of this situation, that is, till we recognise that it is wrong and return to a true relationship of honouring God and obeying him.

Fellowship can only be restored on two conditions, repentance and forgiveness – repentance by the party that has erred from the truth in the relationship and forgiveness by the other. This is how fellowship with God is restored. It is the only way. We must repent of our self-centredness, of our regarding ourselves as equal with God and our thinking that we can trade with him, or lay down our own conditions of service. We must return to a true understanding and a true acceptance of the fact that he is our Creator and we have received everything that we possess as a gift from him.

Repentance is what we must have and God has promised that he will forgive. His forgiveness is so complete that fellowship is restored fully and truly, and it is such that he does not even remember, as it were, our sins. The Bible has many ways of putting this: he casts our sins into the depths of the sea; he puts them behind his back; he blots them out with a thick cloud; he washes them away with water; he does not enter them in his ledger. All these ways of putting the matter amount to the same thing, that when we repent and return to God he completely obliterates from his memory all the things that we have done against him so that fellowship is restored completely; there is nothing that rises up to mar it.

This restoration of fellowship is based on the life of Jesus and the victory he won over evil through his death. God's purpose is fellowship but this purpose was brought to a halt by man's sin and disobedience. Yet God, in his sovereignty, has triumphed over sin through Jesus Christ, has restored fellowship and has fulfilled his purpose. That is why, in any understanding of the world or of human history, Jesus Christ must be at the very centre.

The Bible describes the work of Christ as a work of restoration of fellowship; God was in Christ restoring the world to himself, not imputing to us our sins (*2 Cor. 5:19*). Jesus was the only man whose fellowship with God was never broken, because he was never disobedient but always trustful, always obedient, even when the path of his life led into the bitter depths of an unjust and cruel death. In his obedience to his Father, even to the point of death on a cross (*Phil. 2:8*) we see the perfection of his relationship with God which characterised the whole of his life.

At no point were his thoughts attracted to self, although the temptation to self-pity was never stronger than when he was being unjustly taunted and despised. But there was no word of self-pity, no word of recrimination, only thoughts for others, for provision for his mother, prayer for the

soldiers and a word of comfort for the thief being crucified beside him, and perfect trust in God his Father as he prayed, 'Father, into your hands I commend my Spirit'.

Jesus overcame sin by his life of complete obedience and complete trust, and he overcame the consequence of sin by undergoing the penalty of disobedient humanity. And so we who are in Christ through faith are restored to God's presence.

The Bible has more than one metaphor to describe this new reality. It speaks of us being seated with Christ in the heavenlies or standing in God's presence or, again, as having been introduced to God. What it is saying is that we experience in our spirits fellowship with God through his Spirit being present with our spirits. In Christ God's purpose of fellowship with man has been restored; but it is only in Christ that this fellowship can be restored.

We cannot climb back again by our good works, by the way we live, or by turning over a new leaf. We can be restored to fellowship only by the complete forgiveness which God promises us as we turn back from the untruthfulness of living apart from God and of being the centre of our own life and as we turn back to Christ and recognise him as Lord and Saviour.

Standing here in the circle of truth, God (who is truth) receives us, forgiving all our sins and giving us his Holy Spirit, so that we are able to speak to him in a personal way calling him 'Father'. This fellowship which God establishes with us will not be interrupted by death. Rather it will be strengthened and deepened when we come to be with Christ and see him face to face.

It is essential for us, as Christians, to be quite clear in our own minds about God as Creator and Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord, and to witness to this view of the world in a community which is on the brink of abandoning its Christian heritage.

3

Humanism

Humanism is a modern name for a much older attitude which denies the spiritual, the supernatural, the heavenly and believes that nothing exists except the material things we see around us. Already in the seventeenth century, John Bunyan, wrote in his *Pilgrim's Progress*, 'Heaven is but as a fable to some, and things here are counted the only things substantial!' This attitude became a recognisable movement at the time of the French Revolution, when the catch-cry of the National Convention was 'No God, no master', and a secularist programme for the nation was adopted. During the last century this secularist movement made great inroads into the Christian church by the method of undermining the Bible as God's Word. Within the churches it has generally been known as Modernism or liberalism. It also expressed itself outside the churches in rationalist associations whose members now call themselves Humanists.

H. J. Blackham begins his book *Humanism* by stating the fundamental humanist assumptions, namely that man is on his own in this world and that this life is all there is. This provides the basic humanist world view – it leaves no room for the supernatural; God does not exist; 'man is on his own'; this life is the only life we have, beginning at birth and terminating at death. Death ends everything as far as we are concerned.

The chief objection to this world view of humanism, that

man is on his own and that this life is all, is, quite simply, that it is not true. It does not take into account all the observable facts. It denies the reality of the experience of those who testify to their relation with God.

Take, for example, the life and teaching of Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus taught that he was in close fellowship and communion with God. Indeed, our Lord's teaching goes much further, for he taught that he himself was the Son of God, and he called men to come to him and he would give them rest. The humanist must dismiss Jesus as a deluded deceiver, and pronounce him either bad or mad. Similarly, the humanist must dismiss as untrue the evidence of Christ's resurrection, on which the Christian gospel is based, in spite of the testimony of the honest men who witnessed it. The humanist must further ignore the testimony of Christians that, through faith in Jesus, they have entered a relationship with God through his Spirit that is real and satisfying and which renovates their whole life and character. This claim of Christians that the Holy Spirit's presence changes their life and brings them into a real and satisfying fellowship with God through forgiveness is true and may be verified. But the humanist has to ignore or deny these facts of experience. He also has to deny the reality of answered prayer and of divine provision which is a daily experience for Christians.

So the chief objection to humanism is that it is not true and that it can maintain its position only by ignoring important evidence.

Other consequences follow. The first is that humanism is illogical. It confines the real to what can be observed by the human eye. What the eye does not see cannot exist. And yet at the same time, the humanist maintains that the capacity of the human eye is purely accidental – the result of fortuitous development in the evolutionary struggle for existence!

Thus, by an extraordinary coincidence, the capacity of the eye, brought into being in this accidental way, is to be

regarded as an authentic yard-stick for finding out what exists and what does not and, on the basis of this, the conclusion is reached that the supernatural, the immaterial and the spiritual, because they are unobservable, are regarded *ipso facto* as non-existent. This is a completely illogical deduction.

Secondly, humanism is illogical because it denigrates faith. Relationships with the supernatural are, of course, based on faith. Humanism, therefore, denies spiritual reality because it believes that observation and not faith is the way by which we learn about reality.

Yet faith is the basis of all knowledge, whether reflective or observed. Faith is the root of science. For observation itself is based on our faith that our sensory experience corresponds to reality. Without faith giving us certitude in our observation science would not and could not exist. Therefore, science is primarily based on faith and this is true also if we reflect on the fact that the forming of axioms, which is fundamental to science, is grounded in faith. To prove any of the basic rules of logic involves those rules in the proof. Our certitude with reference to axioms is a product of the faith structure of our minds. Moreover, only in faith does science find its motive. Science seeks the 'general law' but it can work with only a small handful of observed incidents. Science makes universal statements out of a very limited number of instances. There is no logical justification for this universalisation of what is true of a few things. It is an act of faith. Faith is the presupposition of all demonstration.

Thirdly, humanism is illogical because it does not carry to their logical conclusions its first two premises; that man is alone and that this life is all. In the opening sentences of Blackham's book on humanism he goes on to add two other assumptions: the assumption of responsibility for man's own life and for the life of mankind. But how is it possible to speak of responsibility, especially responsibility for others,

when one's world view is that the whole of existence is materialistic and, therefore, purposeless? To *whom* is one responsible? And what meaning is there in speaking about responsibility for mankind when there are no standards of judging apart from one's own opinions? Humanism is only possible in the aftermath of strong Christian faith. It is a temporary phenomenon for it is in a position of unstable equilibrium.

While there have been individual humanists over a long period of time as non-conforming minorities in a theistic society, as a movement it dates from the eighteenth century and historically is a temporary lodging place for those who are passing into militant atheistic materialism.

In spite of high sounding talk about responsibility, humanism cannot protect the individual against the state or against his fellow man. Take, for example, the humanist theory of punishment, which treats the offender as a sick person needing remedial treatment. Presumably the punishment goes on until in the opinion of the person imposing the punishment the remedy is effected, as in communist concentration camps and prisons. In its outcome such a theory of punishment (which we will consider more fully later) is tyrannous in the extreme. Much more humane is the Christian view that we are entitled to punish our fellow men only in proportion to their deserts.

Hitler regarded himself as responsible for mankind when he eliminated the Jews, the weak and the mentally deficient. The Communist regards himself as responsible for mankind when he eliminates whole classes who may be contrary to the ideals of the Party. This leads to the undisguised tyranny of a dictator governing ruthlessly, ultimately in his own interests. For on a humanistic basis there is no reason why he should not.

If we are on our own and have no judge but ourselves, and if this life is all, it follows logically that we should do what we think best for our own lives. It is illogical to limit this by what

other people regard as their interests, but which we do not necessarily allow to be in their own interests, especially if it is not in our interests. Undisguised selfishness, in other words, is the only logical position if we accept the humanist premise that we are on our own and that this life is all.

Besides being illogical, the second defect which follows from its failure to conform to the truth is that humanism is unbearably priggish. Thus, Blackham, in his chapter on the humanist himself, begins with the heading, 'The Person as a Work of Art'. The humanist ideal is to fashion one's life as a work of art. This sounds attractive – it is, however, both impossible and repulsive. It is impossible because we have no control over most of the events of our lives. Things happen to us, accidents and sickness overtake us, and so the work of art may be hopelessly marred. And the ideal is further impossible because of the atrophy of skills. It is not possible to build up one skill upon another, for as we pay attention to some particular aspect we lose our abilities and skills in another area. Furthermore, the defects of memory are such that we forget lots of things that we have laboriously sought to make our own. And, finally, what about old age? How is a person a work of art in old age? A person as a work of art may be an ideal for healthy human specimens living in the upper income bracket of an affluent society; but what message does humanism have for the undernourished refugee, or a single woman living in a subsistence village? To make your life a work of art is an impossible ideal; indeed, it is repulsive, because it is so entirely self-centred. The same may be said of the ideal of balance of which Blackham makes so much. Balance is a non-concept. Any way of life we choose we can call balanced because there is always some other way of life on either side which we are not adopting. Nor is there any merit in balance in itself.

Humanism is simplistic; it does not take into account the realities of human life or of human nature. The conditions of

our life are not open to our choice in the way the humanist requires them to be.

Thus, Blackham writes, 'The Humanist begins his choice of life by choosing to live'.¹ The assumption is that each person has this option. If the terms seem to him too bad he can reject them. To accept them is to discharge all grudge and grievance and to exchange demand for responsibility. He has then always to remind himself that he is not bound to accept the terms and life owes him nothing. This is simplistic. Suicide is not such a simple choice as Blackham makes out.

Human nature is other than what humanism requires for its theories to be workable.

The humanist ideal of balance is the exact opposite to the Christian ideal and, indeed, to what humanity has always regarded as noble. The sentiment reflected in our Lord's words, 'Greater love has no man than this, than to lay down his life for his friends', is regarded by humanists as the ultimate wrong. Yet self-sacrifice has always been regarded as a noble act, not only in the Christian tradition but in the world at large; for example, a mother who gives her life in seeking to save her child from a fire, or a soldier who dies to protect his comrades. Of all such self-sacrifice Blackham writes, 'It is here that the balance has to be struck. If one denies oneself . . . radically and in earnest the well is poisoned. It is an ultimate wrong. To treat oneself as a means only to the need of others . . . is to destroy the source of value'.² Thus, real love, which is always self-sacrificing, is ruled out on humanist principles. Patronising charity, a gift here, a helping hand there, is alone suitable for 'the balanced life'. Prudence is the basic humanistic virtue. It is not very inspiring, and it is completely self-centred. Blackham writes 'To "love my neighbour as myself . . ." is a stupid requirement'.³

¹ H. J. Blackham, *Humanism*, p. 67.

² *Ibid.*, p. 77.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 79.

Humanism is also defective because it impoverishes life. We have seen that it excludes real self-sacrificing love on the principle that to give your life for friends cannot be commended, for it is not possible to make 'a work of art' of that which ceases to exist. Actions must always be self-regarding, otherwise balance is sacrificed. But, of course, true love is never self-regarding. Not only is real love excluded on humanist principles; no place is left for thanksgiving, which is one of the most humanising of virtues.

Life is full of joys and blessings and we should respond with a thankful spirit, but this is meaningless if we are on our own and there is no God who is the source of these blessings to whom we can direct our thanksgiving.

Thanksgiving cannot find any place on humanistic principles and this impoverishes life, and, indeed, impoverishes enjoyment, which is the humanists' objective in life, for it is a matter of experience that heartfelt thanksgiving increases the enjoyment of the things for which you are giving thanks while you are experiencing them, whether it is sex or surfing or only sitting in the sun.

Prudent self-management is a key phrase in Blackham's book; comfort and enjoyment are the objectives. But the Christian ideal is the exact opposite. Saul, the Pharisee – well off, well educated, well connected – abandoned the life of comfort and esteem in order to serve others by teaching truths which he believed to be of transcendental value. In this he was following the example of his Master, the Lord Jesus, who summed up his own life by saying that he did not come to be served by others but to serve and minister to them, and chiefly by giving his life for their salvation (*Mk. 10:45*).

The humanist cannot experience the soul-restoring salve of forgiveness, for when he sins against himself or against humanity or his fellow man, there is, ultimately, no-one who can forgive him and restore him to a sense of harmony with himself and the world.

God forgives those who turn to him. This is the experience which the humanist mistakenly denies as false and self-deceptive. But it is a real experience and immensely health-giving. Yet it is only true if there is a God who hears our prayers and can communicate with us through his Spirit. But humanism can give no place for such prayer, and thus fails to reckon with the fact that prayer has always been a characteristic of humanity.

Finally, humanism denies the most human of all emotions – the reality of hope. Yet all human life is motivated by hope, and recognises that it is geared to what lies ahead, unless we are mentally deranged. We are purposeful in our way of life, we think about the future and plan the present accordingly. But humanism, as all godless materialism, denies that the individual life is ultimately purposeful or that there is any future for us. Things are what they are by accident and, although some of us are personally placed to pluck a few enjoyments and comforts from life as it passes, ultimately nothing lies ahead for any of us. That life is all is its fundamental premise. The humanist's hope, such as it is, is completely centred on the body and the enjoyment that can be had through the body – whether emotional or physical. Yet the body is subject to decay; and memory, which for the humanist is presumably the only source of comfort in old age, is very shallow in its pleasure-producing potential, being hopelessly shot through by forgetfulness. The humanist has no hope because, as Paul put it, he is without God in the world.

The Christians live with hope. Our hope is in our God whom we know, who has already done great things for us, not only in creation but in redemption. We have put our hope in God who will judge the world by the One whom he has appointed, for which he has already given proof in raising him from the dead (*Acts 17:31*).

The Christian agrees with the humanist that this life is enjoyable, but he differs in denying that enjoyment is the object of this life. Relationship and fellowship are the real ends and

provide the truest joys. Such fellowship can only be achieved by forgetting ourselves in favour of others, and will transcend death. God has created the bodies through which we experience this world. We have the hope that the Creator of the body will also resurrect it and that we will continue to be real persons, truly related with God's creation and with one another and with God himself, when we will see him face to face. This is the Christian hope. Human life is based on hope, but the humanist has no hope.

The humanist position is transitional. In its attack on all that reflects Christianity in our social institutions the militant humanist may achieve the breaking down of these elements which humanise society and keep it together. But humanism will not be strong enough to hold back the flood-gate of the primordial passions of selfishness and greed and cruelty which, as a consequence, will flood over and destroy society, giving place to tyranny once a belief in God is removed as the basis of our social institutions. Humanism, of course, is of the opinion that this will not be so, but its view of human nature is simplistic. It believes in the innate perfectibility of human nature, but its belief is not based on any examination of the facts. History shows that human nature has a radical fault from which selfishness, cruelty and tyranny spring.

Once humanism has done its work of removing a theistic basis of society the tyranny of the dictator and the selfishness of the individual and the group will dominate the scene. Reason shows that this will be so and the history of human societies confirms that this is what we must expect from atheism.

Christians have the antidote to humanism and to this we must now turn.

God's Word

The biggest change in Christian churches in this century compared with all previous centuries has been the change in the attitude of Christians to the Bible. In the past the Bible has always been regarded as God's infallible Word. What the Bible says God says. But nowadays, in many of the denominations, this has changed, and the change is having very widespread effects. The Christian faith cannot survive where the Bible is not regarded as God's book, even though the shell, that is the organisation, remains much the same, for Christianity is a supernatural religion and this requires a supernatural word from God, telling us of himself and of his purposes and will for men.

Nowadays, however, there are church leaders who teach not a supernatural God but a God in nature, 'the ground of our being', and many ministers and church programmes are concerned with bettering this world rather than proclaiming a message about the next. The reason for this change is a simple one, namely loss of faith in the Bible as God's Word. Without a supernatural word from God it is impossible to maintain a supernatural view of life and supernatural expectation of the coming of Christ in his kingdom. Unless the Bible is believed to be God's infallible Word, Christianity cannot survive. The name and the church organisations will survive but their content will be changed, for Christianity is a supernatural religion. It believes in a God, one who stands

over and above nature, who created us and the whole universe by calling it into existence by a decision of his own will. Science tells us a little of the process which God used in bringing the world to its present form, but the fact remains (on which science is unable to make any comment) that God is the originator and director of that process.

God stands above nature, not only as its Creator but also as its controller. Not a single event takes place in the universe which he does not control; not even the movement of the smallest electron in the most distant star. The thought is, of course, too stupendous for us to comprehend. Our minds are stupefied by the concept, for we are inclined to think of God in terms of things we know – thinking of him as a general manager of a department store who has to delegate details to his subordinates. Of course this is not so; God who created all the details knows and controls them all.

God is the controller, not only of inanimate things but also of the minds and wills of men, even of sinful men. This is a difficult thought for us to grasp, but we act on its truth every day when we trust God to protect us.

God's control of nature is through nature. He is the author of nature and therefore it is not surprising that he should work in accordance with the laws of his own creation rather than against them. God does not find the laws of nature something intransigent, which get in the way and thwart his will, but rather he works through nature, which he designed for this purpose. Thus, when he carries out his will through men he works in what we would say is a natural way; nevertheless it is God who is carrying out his purpose exactly as he wills.

The all-sovereign God is our heavenly Father who loves and cares for his creation and who wants to enter into fellowship with us, even though we are rebels against his sovereignty and love. Thus we believe in a supernatural God, not only as Creator and controller, but also as revealer of

himself. He has made himself known to men. Centuries ago he called Abraham and Moses and sent his prophets to the children of Israel in order to make himself known to men, to show what his character is and to call men into fellowship with himself.

God's supernatural revelation of himself reached its climax in the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ, the divine Son of God. His name is 'Emmanuel' which means 'God with us'. His perfect life, the sublimity and truth of his teaching, his powerful miracles of love, his own claims and teaching about himself, all testify to the truth reflected in that name 'Emmanuel'. He was, indeed, God with men, his coming a most remarkable supernatural event, his death and resurrection bring a supernatural salvation to us.

The inspiring of the Bible by the Spirit of God is part of this same movement of God in revealing himself to men in order to restore them to fellowship with himself. It is a supernatural book. Although written by men and faithfully reflecting the diverse characters and historical situations of the authors who wrote the sixty-six books that made up the Bible, what gives the Bible its unity is that the Holy Spirit was the true author. He used the writers, not forcing their wills or their minds or their thoughts, but working through these things of which he himself was the Creator, so that what they wrote was not only their own words but, more importantly, God's words; words infallible for the purpose for which God inspired them, which was to teach us about himself and about his relations with men.

We do not need to spend time considering whether God *could* give us a book which, though written in a perfectly natural way by men – sinners and ignorant of many things though they were – yet would in every point exactly reflect the perfect mind of God. God's sovereignty over his own creation sufficiently answers this. The question remains whether he *has* done so, and, if so, to what extent and for

what purpose. In 2 Timothy 3:16-17 Paul sums up the Christian answer: 'Every scripture is inspired of God and is profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for instruction which is in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, furnished completely unto every good work'.

There are many reasons why Christians have believed the Bible to be a supernatural book and the true Word of God. Of course, what ultimately persuades them is that they hear God's Word in it, for when God speaks to the conscience which he has created it would indeed be strange if his voice were not recognised by his children, to whom he has given his Spirit. As Jesus said 'My sheep hear my voice . . . and they follow me' (*Jn. 10:27*). But before we reach that final reason there are some preliminary considerations worth noting. To start with, the Bible itself claims, in many places, to be the Word of God. Frequently there occurs in it this introductory phrase, 'Thus saith the Lord'. Then, too, the Lord Jesus Christ's testimony to the divine inspiration of the Bible is very clear, and for Christians who believe that Jesus Christ is the divine Son of God, this in itself should be quite sufficient.

Jesus knew his Bible thoroughly. He based his teaching on it and regarded it as of final authority. Thus, when he was tempted by the devil, to each temptation he simply quoted a phrase from Scripture, saying, 'It is written' or, as we might put it today, 'The Bible says'. For him this was final. Jesus testified to the infallibility of Scripture by saying in John 10:35 'The scriptures cannot be broken'. After his resurrection he reproved the disciples for their slowness to believe *all* that the Scriptures said (*Lk. 24:25*), and he spent the last hours of his fellowship with them expounding to them the Scriptures.

A very interesting illustration of Jesus' view that whatever the Bible says God says is found in Matthew 19:5. Here Jesus quotes from Genesis 2:24, reminding his hearers what God

the Creator had said in the beginning with regard to husbands and wives, 'For this cause shall a man leave his father and his mother and shall cleave unto his wife, and they two shall become one flesh'. In Genesis this verse is actually the comment of the writer but Jesus said, unequivocally, that God is the author of the sentence. So we see that, for Jesus, the words of the Bible, no matter who was the human writer, are the words of God.

Another interesting verse is Matthew 22:31. Jesus is replying to the Sadducees who denied the resurrection. He established the truth of the resurrection by a verse from Genesis. He prefaced the quotation of the Old Testament with the question, 'Have you never read what was spoken to you by *God*?'. By this sentence Jesus showed that he regarded the Bible as the Word of God ('spoken . . . by God'). Furthermore, it is the written words of Scripture, not merely the thoughts or events behind them, which Jesus called the Word of God, for he asked 'Have you not *read* what was spoken to you by God?' It is the written Word which we read, the sentences and propositions of Scripture, which Jesus designated as the Word spoken by God. Thirdly, note that the written Scripture is revelational. It is a revelation from God to the reader. Jesus asked, 'Have you not read what was spoken *to you* by God?' God speaks to us as we read his Word, for the Word of God is a living word, never merely a thing of the past.

The same attitude to Scripture is reflected in the rest of the New Testament. In Hebrews 3:7 a verse from the Old Testament is introduced by the words, 'Even as the Holy Ghost saith . . .', making clear that the New Testament writer realised that, though the verse was written by the psalmist, the ultimate author was God. Similarly, in Acts 1:16 a quotation from the Bible is introduced by the phrase, 'The scripture which the Holy Ghost spoke by the mouth of David . . .'. This is an interesting illustration of the two-

sided truth. David wrote the words naturally and freely, drawing on his experience, yet the true author was the Holy Spirit, who was infallibly directing those faculties which he himself had given to David. In Acts 4:24-25 there is a very similar introductory formula.

In 2 Timothy 3:15 Paul mentions that Timothy had known the Bible from his earliest years. The apostle affirmed that the Bible is able to make its readers wise unto salvation through faith in Christ Jesus, adding, 'Every scripture is inspired of God and is profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for instruction which is in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, furnished completely unto every good work'.

The Greek word translated 'inspired of God' is *theopneustos*, that is, breathed out by God. It is the final written Word, the end-product, which is under consideration and which is said to be God-breathed.

We sometimes think of God's inspiration as being confined to inspiring thoughts or controlling events of history. But the apostles speak of God's inspiration in relation to the finished product, the spoken or written Word. Of course, such inspiration includes inspiring the thoughts or directing the actions, but it does not stop there. It is the *Scripture*, the final written Word that is breathed out by God, according to the apostles.

Thus Paul speaks of the Bible as the oracles of God (*Rom. 3:2*), that is, infallible utterances, infallible sentences, for this is the meaning of the word 'oracle'. Similarly, in 2 Peter 1:21 we read of Scripture that 'men spoke from God, being moved by the Holy Ghost'. The Bible is from above, essentially. God the Holy Spirit is the prime author. God is able to control his creation so as to fulfil his purposes without destroying his creation, therefore the words of Scripture can be divine words without ceasing to be human words. The church, the Christian community, witnesses to the Bible that here is, indeed, the Word of God.

Sometimes it is contended that the church has given us the Bible and so the church is superior, or at least equal, to the Bible in authority. This is the position of the First Vatican Council and the Council of Trent, which said that church tradition was to be received with equal veneration to the Holy Scriptures. But although the church witnesses to the Bible as the Word of God, and hands it on to us, it does not give us the Bible in the sense of originating it, but itself receives it as a gift from God. The books of the Bible were written *to* the church, not *from* the church. For example, the prophets were sent by God to his church. Sometimes the words of Scripture were received in a very hostile manner by the church. For example, Jeremiah's prophecy was rejected by the Old Testament church to which it was sent.

So, too, the New Testament was written to the church by the apostles. Then, again, we need to remember that, when the Christian gospel was first preached, the preachers brought the Bible with them in the sense that they handed over to the new converts the Old Testament, which comprises the greater bulk of our Bible and which the preachers had, themselves, received as God's infallible Word. They asked their hearers to use the Old Testament Scriptures to check the gospel they were now preaching. In the same way today the church, often in the person of a parent or Sunday School teacher, hands on to us the Bible which it has itself received, adding its word of testimony that in the Bible the voice of God is to be heard.

Again, it is sometimes argued that the Bible is incomplete, and that it needs to be supplemented by church tradition as a source of revelation. But the Scripture itself contradicts this. Three times in 2 Timothy 3:15, Paul affirms the sufficiency of the Bible, 'that the man of God [that is, the Christian] may be *complete, completely* furnished to *every* good work'. Thus Scripture establishes that, when God gave the Bible as a source of revelation, he gave what was complete and

sufficient and which does not need to be supplemented. John says the same in John 20:30–31. He comments that there are many other things which he could have included in his Gospel but what he had included was sufficient. His words are 'Many other signs therefore did Jesus in the presence of his disciples which are not written in this book, but these are written that ye may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and believing you might have life in his name'.

Sometimes it is said, in support of the notion that the teaching of the church is as infallible as is the teaching of Scripture, that God has promised the guidance of his Spirit to the church (which is, of course, true) and that, as a consequence, the church's teaching must be infallible. But this does not follow because the guidance of the Spirit is not given for the purpose of leading us to infallibility. The Holy Spirit's guidance is promised to the individual Christian as much as to the church as a group; for example, Romans 8 tells us that whoever is not led by the Spirit of God is not a child of God, so that all God's children are led by his Spirit. But it is quite plain that we are not led infallibly in the sense that we can rely on our conclusions without needing to examine them.

The same is true of the Holy Spirit's guidance of the group or the church. The result of this guidance (that is, church tradition) is not, in itself, infallible but needs to be examined and, of course, the rule by which we examine our own conclusions or church tradition is the written Word of God. The Scripture's testimony is that it is infallible, and that God's power was exercised in guiding the writers of his Word in a way that makes these words infallible. Thus these words are the Word of God and the means by which the Holy Spirit guides the individual Christian, as well as the whole church.

Primitive Christianity and church tradition are helpful in understanding the Bible, but we should not have recourse to them to supplement what God has given us in Scripture.

It is sometimes said that the teaching of the Bible is obscure so that the ordinary reader cannot understand it but needs to rely on the official interpretation of the church. But the fact is that the teaching of the Bible is clear and is not hard to understand. In 2 Timothy 3:15 Paul congratulates Timothy on having known the Bible from his infancy. He had been taught the scriptures by his mother and grandmother. Anyone who reads the Bible in a modern translation can test the matter for himself and he will find that, like any other book, the Bible was written to be understood by the reader.

It is true, of course, that self-willed people will twist the Bible to support their own views (as Peter says in 2 Peter 3:16), but, in actual fact, there is a very wide agreement among Christians about the essential teachings of the Bible. Most of the differences among Christians are on matters about which the Bible has very little to say. It is we who are at fault in this. We ought not to erect grounds of separation and break the bond of love and duty of fellowship over matters not important enough to be included by God in his revelation in Scripture.

I have quoted the Bible to establish the authority of the Bible. This may be thought to be arguing in a circle. But in fact this is not so for, firstly, Scripture may be treated simply as an historical account of what Jesus taught and his apostles taught. For Christians the teaching of Jesus and the apostles about God is of final authority and what this was may be discovered from the New Testament simply treated as an historical record; and so, to quote the Bible to show what this teaching was, although in fact it establishes the authority of the Bible, is not arguing in a circle. Secondly, it must be remembered that God's Word is self-authenticating. It would be strange if this were not so, as if God's Word needed witnesses from outside to testify to its authority.

Consequently, Christians, in recognising the Bible as God's Word, use it as the source for Christian doctrine. In fact, all Christian doctrines must be drawn from Holy

Scripture. There is, therefore, no reason why we should not use Scripture as a source, not only for such doctrines as the second coming but also for the doctrine of revelation. It is inconsistent to take the Bible's teaching about sin and judgment and incarnation and salvation but yet refuse to accept its testimony as to what is the nature of God's revelation through its written pages.

It is contradictory to acknowledge Christ's authority as a teacher on divine matters and reject his teaching about God's relationship to part of his creation, namely his relationship to the words of Scripture. Christ clearly taught that the Bible is God's Word and cannot be broken.

Again, it is contradictory to accept the Bible as a source of doctrine, believing, for example, such amazing things as the incarnation, the resurrection and the second coming, solely on the ground of the testimony of Scripture to them, and yet reject the doctrine of the Bible in its testimony about the character of Scripture, especially when there is such an immense weight of evidence as to what the apostolic view of Scripture was. We know nothing (and can know nothing) about the future, about such doctrines as heaven and hell, Christ's coming and future judgment, apart from the teaching of the Bible. If we accept these basic Christian doctrines on the authority of the Bible we are hopelessly inconsistent if we reject the teaching of the Bible on the doctrine of inspiration.

We may conclude, then, that the Bible, being God's book, is utterly reliable in all matters in which he intended it should be our teacher. God has given us a book of this supernatural character because, if he had not done so, it would not have been possible for us to have the same faith as the disciples had or Abraham had or those who heard the Old Testament prophets had. The disciples and the Israelites were in a position to hear God's Word directly, and with certainty, either from the mouth of Jesus Christ himself or from a

prophet filled with the Spirit of God. But if we are to have the same religion of trust and obedience we must be in a position to hear the same, sure, direct Word of God. But how can this be, now that Christ has returned to heaven and prophecy has ceased? God has provided for it by inspiring, in a supernatural way, the Holy Scriptures, which are his direct and infallible Word. Those who will read them prayerfully will discover this to be so.

There is a further consideration. The Christian faith is essentially one of trust in God, but it is not possible to have calm confident trust unless we have been given a reliable word or promise in which to trust. If we sense any element of unreliability in that in which we are trusting then, to that extent, trust becomes impossible and we are forced back on our own resources; prudence takes the place of trust. But the Christian gospel calls upon us to have complete trust in God, which implies that we must have an utterly reliable word. And this God has given to us in the Scripture, which is utterly reliable because he has inspired it through his Spirit in a supernatural way, so that its words are his words without ceasing to be the words of the writer.

Again, Christianity is an acknowledgement of the Lordship of Christ. But now that Christ is returned to heaven how does he exercise his Lordship over our hearts, or over the church, except through his clear and true Word? If he had not left us his Word we could not obey him, or if that Word were doubtful or unreliable our obedience would, to that extent, be less than full and we would have to have reservations in our obedience. But Christ calls for complete obedience which, in turn, necessitates a completely reliable Word from him. This has been given to us in the Bible.

The Christian life is a life lived waiting for the completion of God's purposes (*Titus 2:12-13; 1 Thess. 1:9-10; Phil. 3:20; 1 Cor. 1:7; Rom. 8:24-25* etc.). The future is unknowable unless God tells us about it. Man cannot predict even the

weather for the next few days with any certainty. Yet the Christian life, as laid down in the New Testament, is a life lived in the light of the certainty of the world's future according to God's purposes. This is impossible unless the Bible is the infallible Word of God. If we are to live the life of hope and not be found fools God must give us his reliable Word about his purposes. This he has done in the revelation of Jesus Christ and the apostles, preserved for us reliably in Holy Scripture through the work of God's Spirit in the writers.

Any view of the Bible which mingles it with unreliable elements strikes at the very basis of the Christian faith. We may be thankful that God has given us, in the Bible, his inerrant Word, the instrument through which he calls us to faith and obedience, and through which he moulds in us the character of Christ. It is our privilege as well as our duty to believe that Word and to read it regularly and prayerfully and, through it, to trust God completely and to obey him gladly, and thus grow into Christlikeness, as we wait in confidence for the promise of our Lord's return and the coming of his kingdom.

Authority & Honour

Honour is closely related to authority and here is the nub of the modern problem. We do not willingly recognise that other people have authority over us, and this natural attitude is reinforced by modern thinking, where everyone is anxious to do his own thing. Modern existentialism dissolves relationships and makes every person his own independent authority. But God has created us in relationships. Some of these relationships involve responsibility to care for others, and this responsibility clothes such relationships with authority, on the one hand, and with the duty of submission, thanks, respect and honour on the other. The relationship in itself involves the responsibility and, therefore, the relationship involves authority, with the co-ordinate duties of submission and honour. This is in contrast to the modern line of thought which regards authority as residing only in the exercise of the function and not in the relationship itself, so that if the function is being performed badly it is said that there is no obligation to recognise authority. Such an attitude is very widespread and we see it exemplified in books which encourage the scholars to honour and obey only those school teachers who perform well. The school teacher who, in the children's eyes, is not a good school teacher is not to be submitted to or honoured. It is a very pervasive attitude but it is fundamentally mistaken as a simple illustration will show. A captain of a cricket team has authority because of his

relationship to the players and not simply because he is a good captain. His position as captain carries the responsibility to consider the well-being of the team while the team, in turn, has the obligation to submit to his captaincy, so that when he directs a player to any position on the field the player should go readily, not disputing the wisdom of the direction, however ill-judged he may think it to be. He is to dispute the captain's directions only if they interfere with other more important relationships, such as relationships of justice to his fellow man or his obligations to God. So long as the captain remains captain he should be able to expect obedience and honour within the area of his responsibility as captain.

Authority is a consequence of those relationships which involve responsibility to advance the welfare of others. For example, God is our Creator and he cares for his creation, so that the Scripture constantly testifies that God's tender mercies are over all he has made. On our part there is the obligation to recognise his authority, to submit to it and to honour him as our Creator and provider.

Mankind's original and basic sin is the rejection of the authority of God and the refusal to recognise what this relation calls for from us, namely submission and honour. Like Adam, we grasp at equality, we aim to be what we mistakenly think God is like; that is, doing our own thing, being free from any relationship which involves responsibility and obligation. 'Liberty, equality, fraternity' is the motto of the natural man. In this phrase each person is regarded as an independent unit, with no authority one over the other based on some permanent relationship, but only the ephemeral authority which springs from the function of the moment, now one person, now another exercising authority, each submitting to the other in perpetual reciprocation. 'Freedom' is the modern catchword but, of course, it is a chimera. We cannot escape from our relationships to be 'free' to do our own thing. There is no possibility of

experiencing the freedom for which the modern existentialist society is clamouring. Such freedom does not exist. We cannot escape from relationships which imply authority and involve submission, into 'liberty, equality and fraternity', where each is free, equal and merely a brother. God has put us into relationships which transcend mere brotherliness and which imply authority and submission.

Firstly, we are related to God in an unequal relationship. God has the authority of a Creator and Sustainer, in the context of his love for us; we respond with reverence, honour and submission in the context of our love for him.

Similarly, in the human family, the members are in mutual relationships and are not simply autonomous units, as the moderns would have us believe. Husbands and wives have a relationship. The family is a microcosm of God's relationship to the world, so that the husband has the responsibility to provide for and protect his wife, just as God provides for his creation. This responsibility to ensure welfare is co-ordinate with authority and calls for submission and honour. Similarly father and mother together have responsibility to care for and provide for their children; children, on the other hand, have the obligation to recognise the authority that this relationship brings with it, and should submit to that authority by obeying and honouring their parents. As the children become adults the relationship changes; the parents no longer have the same necessity to care for and provide for their children. In that sense, their authority over their children ceases, for authority is co-ordinate with the relationship of responsibility for those over whom authority is given.

So, too, in the structure of the Christian congregation, pastors have the responsibility of oversight and care for those whom God has put within their flock. Christians, for their part, are to recognise the authority that goes with this responsibility and submit to their godly admonition and honour them in their position of pastor: 'Obey them that

have the rule over you and submit to them; for they watch on behalf of your souls, as they that shall give account' (*Heb. 13:17*).

The same is true of government. It has the responsibility to take measures for the welfare of the people while we, in turn, have the obligation to submit to the government, and to honour those who are in a position of authority. For example, we should honour those who hold high political office, and we should pray for them. They have duties towards us and, therefore, authority over us and we must fulfil our part towards them in honouring those to whom honour is due.

We should also remember that Paul enjoins the giving of thanks along with prayer 'for sovereigns and all in high office' (*1 Tim. 2:1-2*). It may seem strange that government is an object of thanksgiving, as we often find that acts of government are personally galling and constricting. Nevertheless, just as we are to pray for government, so we should give God hearty thanks for it, for government is the gift of God to us. It matters little what form government takes; it has differed widely over the centuries and is very diverse in its forms in the world today. What does matter is that it should fulfil its purpose of maintaining justice and righteousness and the rule of law, for only so can we live happily in the community.

The need for government is the result of humanity's sinfulness. Were there no sin, that is to say no selfishness, greed, anger and such like, there would be no need for overt organs of government; we would all be our own governors, doing what is just without external constraint. Interestingly enough Karl Marx recognised this and expressed it by his theory of the withering of the state, which he argued will result from the regeneration of mankind when its economic conditions have been transformed through the class war, revolution and the dictatorship of the proletariat. Marx was, of course, mistaken in thinking that these various activities

would lead to a regeneration of man's nature through economic change. There can be no withering of the state, no dispensing with government, until man is no longer a sinner. The true regeneration is only brought about by the Holy Spirit through the gospel of Christ.

We look forward to the day of renewal and regeneration which God has promised, when there will be a new heaven and a new earth, characterised by righteousness and justice. But till that time comes, external government is a necessity for human society and it is God's gift to us, for which we should not only pray but also give thanks. All exercise of government is a delegation of God's own sovereignty and a reminder that God is Lord of all. He is the supreme Judge and Governor, in whose name human judges govern and to whom they give account.

The purpose of government, as Paul goes on to explain, is that we might live a peaceful and tranquil life: peaceful externally in society, tranquil internally within our own hearts (*1 Tim. 2:2*). Government may be able to establish external conditions of peace but it is only the gospel, with its promise of forgiveness, and faith in a heavenly Father that can bring tranquillity to the heart. But as Paul says, government provides the conditions for men to hear and accept the gospel.

All authority over our fellow man must be exercised in a humane way, that is with rationality and consideration for the human natures over whom the authority is exercised. By ignoring this principle authority becomes authoritarianism, which is the exercising of rightful authority in a way which contradicts human relationships.

Paul is a good example of a man who exercised authority but who avoided authoritarianism. He was conscious of his authority and expected submission to it from the Corinthians. He told the Corinthians that if he came again he would not spare them (*2 Cor. 13:2*) and he asked them, 'Do you

want me to come with a rod or with gentleness?' (*1 Cor. 4:21*). It was a question of whether they were willing to submit or not. The rod is the symbol of coercive authority, but it was not authoritarianism, as coercion is only the ultimate sanction. Paul exercised his authority firstly by explanation, by exhortation, and thus by appeal to the Corinthians' conscience. This was in accordance with human nature and personal relationships.

But he did not abandon the authority which he was conscious that the Lord had given to him (*2 Cor. 13:10*). He did not wish to be severe in the use of that authority but he made clear that he would be severe if that were necessary. He announced that he would expel from the fellowship and deliver to Satan the recalcitrant. In this ultimate exercise of authority, he associated with himself the whole congregation obedient to the mind of the Spirit expressed through his decision. Though Paul did not confuse the giving of advice (*1 Cor. 7:25ff*) with the exercise of apostolic authority, he was, when the occasion called for it, fully authoritative. But he was never authoritarian.

Paternalism, on the other hand, is the exercise of true authority in a way which disregards the stage of development of the personality and, in this respect, disregards human nature and so puts personal relationships in jeopardy. Both authoritarianism and paternalism are the exercise of true authority and, although we could wish it should be exercised in a better way, we are not at liberty to reject the authority just because it is authoritarian or paternalistic.

On the other hand, tyranny is the exercise of authority where there is no right to exercise that authority. It is based on power not on relationships. It may avoid both authoritarianism and paternalism and be very sweet and moderate in its exercise, but if it has no right to be exercised in the area where it is exercised it is tyranny. There is spiritual tyranny as well as secular tyranny. It is important that authority

recognises its limits, just as Paul was conscious of the limits of apostolic authority (2 Cor. 1:24).

True authority arises from responsibility towards those over whom the authority is exercised. But since tyranny does not arise from relationship it is essentially self-centred, the tyrant, whether despotic or benign, advancing his own interests rather than those over whom he reigns.

True authority serves. Jesus is the example here. He had full authority over all flesh. He was rightly called Lord and Master yet he washed the disciples' feet, that is, he stooped to the most menial service that was needed. Yet because authority serves it does not follow that it can be rejected. It expects submission.

It is a helpful exercise to list those whom the New Testament affirms to have authority and, consequently, to whom honour and respect is due:

1. We are to honour and submit to God.
1. We are to honour and submit to the government (*Rom. 13:1ff*). The government exercises a ministry towards us to further our good. But let us remember that the New Testament command to honour the government was given at a time when the government was inefficient, corrupt and venal. Its failure to function well was not taken into account by the New Testament writers when they enjoined on all the obligation to honour the government and to submit to every ordinance for the sake of conscience.
3. Wives are to honour and submit to their husbands, calling them 'lord' (*1 Pet. 3:1,6*). Husbands have the responsibility to take thought for, provide for and protect their wives, as Christ gave himself for his Bride (*Eph. 5:25-33*).
4. Children are to honour and submit to their parents (*Prov. 1:8; Eph. 6:1*).
5. Slaves are to honour and submit to their master. The Scripture is clear that this submission and honour is

due to bad masters as well as to good. 'Servants, be submissive to your masters with all respect . . .' (i.e. honour) ' . . . not only to the kind and gentle but also to the overbearing' (*1 Pet. 2:18*). Authority and honour are involved in the relationship, even when it is functionally bad.

6. Members of the congregation are to honour and submit to those who are over them in the Lord. Once again, this honour is due to the position held and not merely to those who function well. It is true that those who work well are worthy of double honour (*1 Tim. 5:17*), but from this it follows that even those who do not function so well are worthy of honour.

It is important to recognise that the authority and the consequential duty of submission and honour reside in a relationship which involves responsibility to provide for. This responsibility requires an on-going relationship and not merely a momentary one, coincident with the discharge of the function. Provision involves forethought and preparation beforehand at a stage quite unknown to the recipient. It is this on-going relationship involving responsibility to take thought for, that invests those having this responsibility with authority towards those who are the recipients of the benefit.

6

Social Justice or Compassion?

Many Christian leaders say that the Christian mission contains a strand of campaigning for social justice. Some go so far as to say it is the main thrust of the Christian mission. Others, more evangelical, wish to add the crusade for social justice to the mission of making known the Christian gospel.

If, however, we turn to the New Testament we find that there is no support for the view that social justice is an objective of the Christian mission. We must remember that Jesus sends his followers into the world with the same objectives as he was sent into the world by his Father, for he said, 'as the Father has sent me, even so send I you'.

The teaching and actions of Jesus nowhere show a concern for 'social justice'. The reason is that the call for social justice springs from envy rather than from compassion. The notion of equality is not set before us by God in Holy Scripture as something to be striven for. Equality was the catchword of the French Revolution, which was anti-Christian in its motivation.

The Christian life is very simple. It is to live in the circumstances in which God has put us in a Christian way, keeping the commandments of God, serving one another, and waiting for our Lord from heaven. In addition, some Christians will be sent by the Lord of the harvest to evangelise, to bring the knowledge of the gospel of Christ to those who have not heard it, and other Christians will be sent

as pastors and teachers in Christian congregations. All Christians are expected to be ready to give a reason to those who ask about the grounds of their hope of Christ's coming, and we are to help those in need.

Compassion, not social justice, is the motivation for Christian social action. The Christian will find himself in many situations which call for compassion. Compassion is of the essence of God's character, and compassion characterised Christ's life. Christian history confirms this. It was compassion, not a sense of social justice, which sustained William Wilberforce in his life-long campaign to bring slavery to an end. Of course he was not able to achieve his objective single-handed, but he formed societies of like-minded men and women to assist him in the cause to which compassion for the suffering of his fellow man urged him.

A generation later Lord Shaftesbury was sustained in his parliamentary campaigns to alleviate the conditions of children in factories, mental defectives in asylums and chimney sweeps, by his Christian compassion. He saw their suffering and their deprivation and, being a member of parliament, he used his position to alleviate their conditions.

Above all, it was compassion for the lost which prompted the formation of Christian missionary societies to bring the gospel to our fellow men, of whom the Word of God clearly teaches that they are under eternal wrath, unless saved through the blood of Christ.

Christians live their lives waiting for the coming of Christ's kingdom, but as they wait they serve God by serving their fellow men as their circumstances indicate. Those in parliament serve through parliament, those in a more private station serve in their own spheres; and the motivation for service springs from the Holy Spirit's presence and reflects the compassion of God. 'We love because he first loved us' (*1 Jn. 4:19*); 'But if any one has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does

God's love abide in him?' (1 Jn. 3:17). Genuine compassion will always show itself in action to alleviate distress as far as it is able when that distress comes within the orbit of our life.

Jesus was compassionate and his chief service was to preach the gospel and to lay down his life for us. When the events of life brought people's sorrows within the orbit of his experience, compassion prompted the helping action, as when he healed the leper, or raised the widow's son at Nain. On the other hand, he deliberately refused to act in matters of social injustice which were drawn to his attention. Thus, when Martha complained about the unequal amount of housework she was shouldering Jesus did nothing to set the matter right. Instead he gently rebuked her for her wrong sense of values. When a man complained that his brother had taken the whole of the inheritance and asked for Jesus' help to obtain a fair share, he rebuked the man sharply for his covetousness.

Calls for social justice spring from envy and anger but compassion has a very different source, the Spirit of God himself. Christians should pray for compassion and be willing to put themselves out in helping other people in need, indeed to devote their whole life to alleviate sorrow and distress, if necessary as Wilberforce and Shaftesbury did. Such alleviation of distress may call for social legislation, but the motivation is not to be so-called 'social justice', the pulling down the one in order to equal up the other, but rather compassion and help to those who need it.

Poverty calls for compassion. Poverty is painful; and action should be taken to make it a thing of the past. But a Christian is not called on to campaign for a closer equalisation of incomes, either within our own society or, for that matter, between nation and nation. Christ's gospel is not concerned with equality but with relationships, with God's forgiveness of us and our compassionate help towards our

fellow man in need. It was unalloyed compassion that prompted the Saviour to die for us, and the Father to give his Son that, through faith in him, we might not perish but have eternal life.

The Basis of Punishment

The teaching of the Christian faith is that punishment is based on the concept of justice. Justice may be defined as giving everyone what is their due. Justice treats people as people. We never ask, for example, what is due to a plant. We deal with plants not from the point of view of what is due to them but rather from what is advantageous or beneficial for some object we have in mind. But men and women must never be treated in this way. The concept of justice is the recognition that men and women have rights – rights which are due to them.

Justice is a concept deeply rooted in our personality. One of the earliest expressions of a child in a family is the cry, 'It is not fair', meaning, of course, 'It is not fair to me'. But at least this shows that even a child has a sense of what is due to each person within the family group.

The Bible makes it clear that God treats us on the basis of justice. Constantly throughout the Bible the principle occurs that 'God renders to every man according to his works'. Justice is two-sided: to those who deserve a reward it is unjust to keep it back and to those who deserve punishment it is unjust to disregard it. Justice, then, is distributive and retributive: rendering to every man his due, whether by way of reward or punishment.

Christ taught that God will not overlook even the most insignificant action that deserves a reward. He said that those

who gave even a cup of water in his name would receive their reward (*Mark 9:41*). At the same time he taught that God would not overlook even the most insignificant wrong-doing, but warned that we will have to give an account, even for every idle word (*Matt. 12:36*). How much more, therefore, for every other wrong action or thought?

Justice, then, includes the double aspect of reward and retribution. Sometimes retribution, which is the basis of punishment, is confused with revenge; but the difference is very clear. Revenge is selfish, and the Bible makes it clear that there must be no revenge in the administration of justice. You must render what is due, not what gives you satisfaction. That is why it is set down in the beginning of the Old Testament, that in meting out punishment, justice (or what is due) must not be exceeded.

Normally, when somebody does us a quite unprovoked wrong, our anger wells up and we feel like paying him back double, if not sevenfold, but the Bible forbids it: 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth', nothing more. Of course, Scripture points out that there is even a better way, and that is to accept the wrong done to ourselves by extending mercy and forgiveness. We are not to be like the murderer, Lamech, in Genesis 4, who threatened seventy-seven times revenge; we are to forgive personal injuries, if necessary seventy-seven times (*Matt. 18:22*).

But mercy must always start from justice. Forgiveness can only be extended when retribution has been deserved. It is only when the principle of an eye for an eye is accepted as a just principle that we are able to modify it by extending mercy. So the starting point in determining what punishment should be imposed must be, 'What does the crime deserve?'

The Bible makes it clear that, if for selfish, wilful reasons, you murder someone, cut short his life, make his wife a widow and his children fatherless, then you deserve to die

yourself. This is taught clearly in the Old Testament in Genesis 9, 'Whosoever sheds man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed', and also, in the New Testament in Romans 13, where the apostle speaks of the judge as 'God's minister' in using the sword, that is to say, in putting to death those who deserve death. Paul's approval of the magistrate's possession of the 'sword', which is an instrument of death, and his use of it as God's minister, implies approval of the imposition of capital punishment when it is deserved.

It is, of course, possible to mitigate justice by mercy if the circumstances indicate that this ought to be done. But the first thing to establish is, 'What does the crime deserve?' In other words, we must look back to the crime and not forward to the effects of the punishment on the criminal.

There are, of course, many people who have an interest in opposing capital punishment, such as social workers, penologists, psychiatrists, and all those who give themselves to the rehabilitating of offenders. The last named are interested in the effects of punishment on the criminal and if you take away a man's life there is no opportunity for the exercise of their professions. Their work is a very noble work but we must remember that punishment is not inflicted, primarily, for the benefit of the criminal nor for the benefit of society, but because justice indicates that the criminal deserves punishment. So, in assessing what deliberate murder deserves, we must treat as secondary the arguments which spring from the effect of the punishment.

This doctrine of retribution is, in fact, the only basis on which punishment can ever be inflicted, for we have absolutely no right to lay even a hand on our fellow man by way of arresting him, or later imprisoning him, unless he deserves it, and unless we are acting in the name of his Creator, as a minister of God (as the Bible describes the magistrate).

We cannot treat men and women as though they were

plants and animals and use them in a way that we think beneficial, either to themselves or to society. It is only because a person has deserved to be punished that we can take into consideration secondary benefits, such as the opportunity of reforming the criminal, or of the deterrent example of his punishment.

The first question to be asked is 'what does the crime he has committed deserve?' This question seems seldom to have been asked by those who discuss the merits of capital punishment.

Not everyone has the right to punish (or to blame). Status is essential for inflicting punishment (including blame). This is true in the home, in society or between the nations. Thus, it is only because the private soldier is united with the nation that he has the right to take part in inflicting the judgment of war.

The humanitarian view of punishment, which is that it should be inflicted only as a deterrent or as a cure for criminal propensities, though it has the appearance of being merciful, is most cruel to the criminal, for it means that, from the moment he breaks the law, he is deprived of his rights as a human being. The humanist theory removes from punishment the concept of desert. But desert is the only connecting link between punishment and justice.

On the humanistic theory, punishment is removed from the sphere of the common man's ability to estimate whether it is fair, into the sphere of the expert as to whether it is effective. If we stood in the dock we would all much prefer to be judged by the community's sense of fairness rather than by some expert's view of what was good for us.

On the remedial view of punishment the offender should, of course, be detained until he is cured. This is the communist theory of punishment, often involving lifelong curative treatment in Siberia. But what right have we got to 'cure' a man against his will in this way? And how terrifying

is the prospect of living in a community where justice, that is to say, retributive punishment, is abandoned, and the curative, or remedial theory alone holds the field? Anyone might be arrested and subjected to this curative treatment, whether or not they deserve it (as we would say), because the concept of desert belongs to the theory of retribution and this has been abandoned by the humanists. The fact is, of course, that punishment in itself does not reform. Love reforms; when punishment is administered by someone who is loved it becomes chastisement and leads to repentance and reformation.

The alternative humanist theory is that punishment is inflicted for deterrence as a safeguard of society. This is an even worse basis for punishment, as it involves using people as a means to an end; and the benefit aimed at is not the culprit's, as in the reformatory theory, but the community in general. People are thus used for somebody else's end, which is morally reprehensible. This theory means that punishment need have no relationship to the crime but only to the effect, as to whether it actually deters or not. It might well be argued, if our society were to become non-Christian, that grossly cruel punishments are the most effective deterrents. This was the case in society before Christianity made its influence felt. The cruel punishment of crucifixion, for example, was inflicted for the sake of deterring criminals, as a safeguard to society. But it was unjust to use people this way, even criminals. You must only inflict on a criminal what he has deserved. This is the Christian doctrine of justice and retribution.

But if this is true, then you are not at liberty to ignore the question, 'What does this crime deserve?' This is the starting point. What does the deliberate wilful murder of a man doing his duty deserve? The Bible, as well as unbroken Christian tradition, has always said it deserves death. This may be modified by mercy, but justice, retributive justice (not

revenge), is the starting point. At the same time, if punishment is deserved then it must be imposed by those who have the responsibility for administering justice in society. We are not at liberty to neglect or modify this duty when we find it very unpleasant.

If this is the true way of looking at things we must remember that God, the perfect Judge, will treat us in the same way, and ask the question 'What does our life deserve?' There can be one answer only – our condemnation – and that is why the Christian faith makes the cross of Christ central; for Jesus Christ alone has lived the perfect life, and so has deserved and received God's approval, and in his death he has borne our punishment. And so, in this double way, he is our Saviour.

It is only by relationship with Christ, by faith, that we can be forgiven and so be approved at God's judgment throne and received into his fellowship. It is because God loves us that he became our Saviour. Unless we are forgiven we must endure the just retribution of our sins. Forgiveness does not come through our own moral efforts, but God forgives freely and completely all who come to him through Christ.

8

Race

A verse that immediately comes to mind when the question of race arises is Galatians 3:28, where Paul says that for those who are in Christ 'there can be neither Jew nor Greek, neither slave nor free, neither male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus'. Paul repeats this in Colossians 3:11 where he says that in Christ 'there cannot be Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, bondman, freeman; but Christ is all and in all'.

From these verses we see that the differences which estrange man from man no longer do so when the Spirit of Christ changes the heart. Before his conversion Paul, as a Jew, did not even eat meals with Gentiles. So, too, Greeks despised barbarians and men regarded themselves as superior to women. But when a man gives his loyalty to Christ the old loyalties which centred round these differences are done away with. All are one in Christ Jesus. Fellowship with others is no longer restricted in the way it was before a man was converted to Christ.

It would, however, be a mistake to use these passages as though the old differences had evaporated. They are still there, but they are no longer barriers to Christian fellowship. For example, a man is still a man and a woman a woman; the barbarous Scythian still belongs to a very different culture from the civilised Greek. These divisions are still real and are still the basis of political life, and it would be folly to ignore

them. But what Paul is saying is that, in Christian fellowship, they are not barriers to true relationships with one another because Christ is a unity. These verses refer to the fellowship in Christ experienced by those whose hearts have been changed. They are misapplied if taken to be the mind of God in regulating the affairs of nations.

The gospel deals with the supernatural relationship of the believer with Christ in the Holy Spirit and the consequent relationship of Christians with Christians in the heavenly church, or gathering, as we all stand together in the presence of God. To turn the gospel into a social programme, as modern preachers do, will greatly mislead those who follow them. They will all finish up in the ditch, as Jesus warned, if they are not already in it. So let us turn back to the Bible to see what it teaches about nations and races.

The word 'race' in its current use is modern. The Bible term is 'nation'; another synonym would be 'culture'. All three words – 'race', 'nation' and 'culture' – refer to the fact that people form themselves into groups round a common centre of loyalty. People who live in the same territory identify together and form a nation or race and often develop a distinctive culture which strengthens the concept of being members of the one group.

But there are other centres round which people group themselves, such as religion. The Jewish race, or nation, is an example of this. But more frequently language is added to religion and historical background to become the centre round which the group forms, as in the case of the French-Canadians, for whom language, religion and a common ancestry and locality combine to form a very self-conscious centre of loyalty. And when colour of the pigment of the skin and different physiognomy are added as well there is a very strong and distinct unifying force to keep the group conscious of itself.

The true centre of loyalty for every man created in God's

image is Christ. But even Christians form sub-cultures, making their own denomination a centre of loyalty and so cutting themselves off from fellowship with other fellow Christians. How much more, then, those who are not regenerate by the Spirit of God form strong and exclusive centres of loyalty round the group with which they identify. Thus races or nations form.

The nations exist in the separateness in which we know them today, as the result of God's judgment on the sinfulness of man. This is clear from Genesis 11. Nations, or groupings, are not wrong in themselves. In fact, they are natural developments of family descent. But their isolation and division through the growth of self-centred loyalties is the result of sin. Nevertheless, God uses this separateness as a way by which the world is able to continue on in some sort of peace, in order that the gospel might go out to win men and women to Christ, the true King.

Genesis 10, verses 5, 20, 25 and 31, together with Acts 17:24-27, make clear that the separation of the nations into geographical units, each in its own territory and land, is the will of God. It is part of the providential order by which God governs the world. All God's providential government takes into account sin in the heart of man and is for the purpose of providing an opportunity for the gospel, that man may be saved. The division of the nations into separate units, each in its own geographical area, is an example of this, for without this geographical separation there is bound to be unbearable friction. Even with this geographical separation it is difficult enough to get the nations to live peaceably together. Yet our world would be much worse without it.

We have a simple illustration from ordinary life. If three or four families live in the same house it is difficult to keep the harmony, even among friends, for each family is its own centre of loyalty, and members of each family will be in friction with each other and be jealous of each other. They

will criticise each other and quarrel with each other. If, however, you separate the families into three or four houses next door to each other then there is the possibility of true relationships developing as people talk to each other across the back fence, help each other bring each other's washing in and exchange plants for each other's gardens and so on.

The same is true of the nations. Thus God has ordained that national groups should occupy their own geographical areas. Now if one group wishes, by force of arms, to settle down in the territory of another group, the latter group has the right to resist this invasion, and it is normally assumed that this settling down of one national group in the midst of another can also be lawfully prevented by immigration regulations. In fact every country has immigration laws to prevent another nation taking over a country by swamping it with migrants, even though it is not a deliberate policy.

But what is to be done when this situation has already come about; that is, when one national group, one culture, one race finds another race occupying the same geographical area? If it were possible to assimilate the two together this, of course, would be the solution. But human nature being what it is, each group will fight tenaciously for its own continuance as a cultural unit and will resist assimilation if possible.

When one group is small compared to the other the two may live at peace, though perhaps not without friction. When the two groups approach one another in size there is a real problem generated by fear of each other. In the past this problem has been solved by mass expulsions or even by massacres of one group by the other. These solutions are forbidden to a Christian government for we must always remember that justice is the only rule by which we are to regulate our relationships and our actions towards others, even towards our rivals and our enemies.

Nevertheless, unscrambling the situation by designating different geographical areas for each group to settle in does

not seem, in itself, to be an unjust solution, so long as it is carried out justly and fairly. It is with these thoughts in mind that Christians should speak on racial matters. When Abraham separated his family from the family of his nephew Lot, because of the quarrels that arose between the two groups, he offered Lot the best land to settle in, himself taking the poor hill country.

This is the example to be followed when a governing group separates another group from its own territory. It is not the policy of geographical separateness that Christians should condemn, but any injustice in applying the policy; however they need to be on their guard lest they hastily conclude that things are unjust when they are not really so. But genuine injustice needs to be fearlessly condemned. For no policy that is a right one ever requires acts of injustice for its implementation.

The object of life is fellowship with God through the gospel. The facilitation of fellowship should be the object of government. Barriers to fellowship should not be tolerated, unless they are temporary measures designed to assist a policy for greater and more permanent fellowship.

There is a final word which the Bible has to say about the nations. On the eve of his ascension Jesus told his disciples to reach the nations with the gospel to make them Christ-centred rather than self-centred. But it does not seem that this will be completed till the City of God descends from heaven, when we read that the nations will be healed by the tree of life which grows in the paradise of God. This promise of healing is an acknowledgement that the separateness of the nations, the races, the cultures, is a consequence of the sinfulness of mankind. But their very separateness will, in the end, turn to blessing, as the nations bring their contributions, their different cultures, backgrounds and insights to the one unified people of God inhabiting the City of God, that is the heavenly church.

This will take place at the regeneration of nature when Christ returns as Judge and King, as we read in Revelation 22. Meanwhile, the separateness of the nations is God's will and will continue on till the Second Coming. But both within the nation itself and in a nation's relationship with its neighbour nations, the principle must always be that of justice, treating people as persons and giving them what is due to them and being in true relationship and fellowship with them. Only those who are regenerate in Christ will be able to achieve this truly and that is why we must bend our prayers and our efforts to increasing the knowledge of God and of Christ throughout the world.

9

Money

Money figures largely in our thoughts. We occupy ourselves in thinking a lot about it, about how much we have got, how much we need, how much we earn, how much we can spend. The New Testament also has much to say about money and what it says is quite remarkable, because it is the opposite of what we normally think about money.

Before we examine what the New Testament says about it we need to ask ourselves whether we are willing to accept God's thoughts on the subject of money when these are clearly announced in the pages of the Bible and particularly taught by Jesus himself. Does God the Creator know more about the management of money than we do and are we willing to accept his words as the rule for our conduct in this subject, to which we give so much of our attention? Christian obedience means complete obedience and not only in those things where we happen to agree with God. Christian faith means trusting God, even when our own views seem to suggest the contrary.

The first thing to note in the biblical teaching about money is that affluence is unimportant. Having a little more or a little less is irrelevant to life. Jesus taught this very clearly when he said, 'a man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions' (*Lk. 12:15*). From this it follows that the first virtue to be cultivated with regard to the handling of money is the virtue of contentment. Thus Paul teaches

clearly that having food and clothing, with these we should be content (*1 Tim. 6:8*). His remarks are in the context of his condemnation of Christians who think that the Christian life and particularly the Christian ministry are ways of making money and becoming rich and he comments, 'the Christian life with contentment is certainly great riches'.

Godliness with contentment is the apostle's recipe for living; it brings complete release from the rat-race. We are to live within our circumstances, for our circumstances are God-given. God is sovereign; the silver and gold are his. He is able to multiply money if we need it as easily as he multiplied the loaves and fishes on the hillside in Galilee, or as he multiplies the grain of wheat by turning it into the ear of corn through his rain and his sunshine and the fertile soil of his creation.

The second point about money that the Bible underlines is an obvious one, namely that affluence is unreliable. We can lose it quickly, and we all lose it at death, or in old age when we can do nothing with the money because of the weakening of our physical frame. Jesus, therefore, warned his disciples not to seek to be rich in this world but rather to be rich towards God. He told the story of the rich farmer whose fields had produced abundant harvests. Instead of thanking God he simply said, "What will I do? I will do this, I will pull down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. And I will say to my soul, soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; take your ease, eat, drink, be merry". But God said to him, "Fool! This night your soul is required of you and the things you have prepared, whose will they be?" So is he who lays up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God' (*Lk. 12:18-21*).

Money tempts us very strongly to put our trust in it but it is a very uncertain thing and, after all, is completely under God's control. Thus the apostle Paul tells Timothy: 'As for the rich in this world, charge them not to be haughty, nor to

set their hopes on uncertain riches but on God, who richly furnishes us with everything to enjoy. They are to do good, to be rich in good deeds, liberal and generous, thus laying up for themselves a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of the life which is life indeed' (1 Tim. 6:17-19).

Affluence is unreliable. It is a snare to rely on money for the future. Our trust must be in God who is in charge of our future and who will supply our needs.

WEALTH

Wealth and money is a subject which interests us all, whether we have got it or whether we want it. A lot of people give their whole lives to thinking about money and there are daily newspapers entirely devoted to money matters. What should the Christian think about his wealth or other people's wealth? The Bible has some important things to say. The first is that we should correct our view of reality. We should take into account the whole future, we should keep in mind all the facts which go to make up reality and wealth should be fitted in properly into this. Reality takes in eternity; we have a life beyond death whether we believe this or not. It is not our decision any more than being born in the first place was our decision. Eternity is real; we will live on after death and the future should govern our attitudes and actions in the present. We should lay up treasure in heaven – to quote Jesus' words – that is where our bank balance and investments should be. We should make use of the present to secure the future.

Jesus told the story of a dishonest manager who had been given notice by his employer and who took the opportunity before he left his job of suggesting to all the debtors that they should write out documents showing that they owed only half of what they actually did and he would endorse it. In this way he secured the future goodwill of these men when he

NOT BY BREAD ALONE

would need it. He had a hold over them. He was an example of a man who used the present to secure the future. Jesus said that in this respect men of this world are often wiser than Christians. Christians ought to lay up treasure in heaven and set their heart on that true reality. Indeed, it is not just a desirable option but a clear command: 'Set your minds on things above where Christ is, not on things of the earth,' 'for the things that are seen are temporal but the things that are unseen are eternal'. Remember, 'If riches increase set not your heart upon them' (Col. 3:2; 2 Cor. 4:18; Ps. 62:10).

We are to be heavenly-minded because this is reality. We are to switch our thoughts to heavenly truth when we find them being taken up with material possessions. Money is a gift from God but it is temporary. Eternal life is a gift which lasts forever. So we are to sit lightly to our possessions and not to let our thoughts dwell on them but rather on God and his eternal inheritance. Remember the story of the rich farmer who had a bumper crop and said to himself, 'I'm O.K. for the rest of my life.' But he died that night and went to God's judgment throne empty handed. He had not laid up treasure in heaven, but only on earth. He was rich, but not rich towards God. Jesus called him a fool; and so he was, for he was short sighted. He did not take in the whole of reality.

So the first rule in thinking about money is to put it in its proper perspective. Be rich in heaven rather than on earth. Have your heart on heaven, sit lightly to the things of this life; and if your riches increase, set not your heart on them.

THANKFULNESS

What should be our attitude to wealth?

As we have said, one of the commands of Scripture which the modern world neglects is the command to be content with such things as you have. We have already quoted Paul's

words that if we have food and raiment we are to be content. Contentment is a great virtue and, like all virtues, brings happiness. The command to be content can be put round another way and then it becomes one of the ten commandments: 'You shall not covet'. The method to obey these commands is to get our priorities right and to strengthen our faith in God. Jesus said, 'Seek first God's rule, his kingdom, his righteousness and God will supply all your needs for he knows what you need'.

Along with contentment should go thanksgiving. We should thank God for all the blessings we enjoy. We are immensely wealthy compared with people in former times. Abraham and Isaac, for example, were immensely wealthy in their own day, but the poorest among us is better off. He has a more comfortable chair to sit in, a softer bed to sleep in, a more permanent house to live in, better transport than the old camel, beautiful music to listen to, interesting places to visit and so on. With regard to all the things that money can buy (and money has no other purpose) we are much better off than the richest man of those early times. Wealth is a gift from God and we ought to give him thanks continually.

Then there is more than one form of wealth for which we ought to be thankful. If we have health and a pleasant situation to live in, this too is a gift to us from God; we should open our hearts to him in thanks. We have opportunities for gaining knowledge, an upright and stable government, friends and so on. These are real forms of wealth and we ought to be overflowing in thankfulness for what we have been given in this life, quite apart from the heavenly wealth, the spiritual blessings which we now enjoy, forgiveness and friendship with God and the eternal inheritance which is laid up for us in heaven if we are God's people.

Contentment and thanksgiving are basic if we want to have a right attitude to wealth and money.

RESPONSIBILITY

In considering the Christian use of money it is important to realise that we must act responsibly in the use of the money under our control. The first principle is that we must be willing to share our money with those in real need whom God's providence brings within the orbit of our life. It is not as though we have to go without in order that others might have affluence, but rather that we might share our blessings with those who have need of our help.

There are two great obstacles to sharing. The first is greed. We want more and more for ourselves. Such greed is self-centred and can be cured only by God. We must call upon him in prayer to give us his Holy Spirit so that our attitudes to life may agree with his character. God himself is a giving God and he gives us everything to enjoy fully. When we love God we will be able to love our brother, so we will rise above greedy and selfish use of our money and share our resources with those who have real need.

Greediness grows if encouraged – we may be surprised how greedy we have become without noticing it. Of course gambling is essentially greed and an individual or a community that indulges in gambling (no matter how small is the sum) will become increasingly greedy and less inclined to help others in times of need. Gambling has this effect, even if the sum is small, because its motive is just as much greed as if the sum were large. It is sad when a government encourages this vice of greed in order to obtain taxes, for it will undoubtedly have an evil effect on community living and community response in times of crisis. Moreover, the greedy person is not a happy person; he is never satisfied with his self-centredness.

The other obstacle to sharing our money is fear. We are frightened that we will leave ourselves short if we give it away; not short, perhaps, in the present, because we can

estimate that, but in the future with all its uncertainties. The answer to this sort of fear is faith in God's faithfulness in the future. It is he who has given us our present possessions and he has promised that, if we seek to do his will, he will give to us what we need when we need it.

God is in control of every event in the world, including the business world and the world of our own private life. He has promised us heaven and a wonderful heavenly inheritance and Christians should live in the light of that promise. He has promised us provision for the rest of the life that is this side of heaven, and we should live in the light of this promise as well. So when tempted to hesitate in helping other people in their real need as you come across the need, remember God's promise to be faithful.

He who has given us life will give us the means to sustain life and not only our life but the life of our children too. Indeed, as Paul says, the love of God is such that we have no grounds for fear. He wrote, 'God, who spared not his own Son but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not freely with him give us everything?' (*Rom. 8:32*).

We have a great inheritance in the future. Christ has provided it through his death and we have already begun to enjoy it through his Spirit. If we keep our thoughts on this inheritance we will not clutch to ourselves what God has given us in this life, but will share it with generosity. Sharing is the first great principle in the use of our money.

In considering the Christian's use of his money, another principle to remember is that no-one, whether Christian or non-Christian, should ever have, as a primary goal, the aim to make money. This is because such a goal, when it is the primary aim, is self-centred and we should never be self-centred in our actions towards others. The use of money, whether in business or in any other way, brings us into contact with people and all our contacts and relationships with other people should be with the object of serving them.

This is the principle on which human life has been made by God. This is the principle exemplified by Jesus Christ the Son of God who came among us 'as one who serves'. If we aim, primarily, at making money when we are in contact with other people, we aim at something selfish, we are looking to our own self-interests rather than the interests of those with whom we are in contact, and this remains true, whether we expand the concept of self into self and family or into religious objectives in which we are interested.

Consequently, in our use of money, whether we are conducting a business or developing a property or investing in shares, our primary aim and motive must never be to make money but rather to see how we can serve other people with the money God has put in our control. This applies to all people but especially, of course, to Christians and the Christian church.

For example, if we have a block of land which we wish to develop it must not be, primarily, to make money from it, but we must ask ourselves whether, through the development, we are serving the community. Similarly, if we are landlords, in conducting our business with our tenants, we must not primarily aim to make money out of them but rather to serve them, since we have been put, by providence, into this position of serving them as landlords. We are not to get rid of our tenants because we find serving their interests inconvenient. If we are businessmen our business must be conducted to confer benefit on our customers, and similarly directors of public companies must not be primarily interested in the size of the profit which they are able to announce in their annual report to the shareholders, but they must be primarily concerned with the people their company comes into contact with through its business.

All this does not mean that we are not to make money. Of course we need to make a profit if we are going to maintain our home and family, and if we are going to have money to

invest for the better development of the community's resources. But the primary aim and motivation of our actions when we are in relation to other people must not be to make money but, rather, to serve these other people within the perimeters required by the need to maintain the service through having enough to live on and develop our resources. In a word, no-one, Christian or non-Christian, in using his money, should have as his primary aim the making of money, or even the conserving of his equity, but his aim should always be that which Jesus had, namely true concern and service for his neighbour.

The money under our control, or the property which we own, is simply that part of God's creation which we have the responsibility for using. And we must use it in accordance with the character of God, its Creator. Our using it will bring us into contact with people. This means that we must serve them in our using it, for serving other people is the true motive for actions in our relationships with other people.

THE CHRISTIAN STANDARD

The apostle Paul makes an interesting comment about Jesus in his second letter to the Corinthians (8:9) where he says, 'Though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor'.

Many people become poor because of circumstances beyond their control, but Jesus became poor by the deliberate decision of his will. This is the exact opposite of our normal human will. The whole of our society directs its will to becoming rich and richer, and richest if possible. God did not make us for this but rather to serve one another. Business should be service, but it is being turned into making money as its primary objective. And so the whole of modern society aims at increasing its possessions and becoming richer.

Even dedicated Christians and Christian institutions, like denominations, may find themselves seeking money as their first objective, anxious at least to maintain their present position money-wise if not to improve it slightly, but Jesus willed to become steadily poorer. In the end he willed to lay down his own life; no-one took it from him but he willed to lay it down. This is complete poverty as far as this life is concerned. He became poor.

Paul's life story is similar. He appears to have been born into a rich home and he had excellent prospects, but he became poor; he constantly set his will in that direction, involving himself more and more in poverty. He, too, in the end, laid down his life in the course of his ministry.

There is a curious phenomenon often observable among Christians, that a man or woman may decide to give up his standard of living and his prospects in order, for example, to become a missionary or minister, or take on some other form of service and then, after this initial decision, which puts him permanently into a lower income bracket, he begins to be concerned with accumulating just a little extra, a few extra fees, a little better salary, or he may be concerned about the sort of house he is asked to live in or the sort of suburb.

There was a similar phenomenon in Paul's day with the ministers of the gospel seeking to make a living out of the gospel – peddling the gospel – as Paul put it in 2 Corinthians 2:17, or making merchandise out of the gospel, as Peter put it in his second letter (2 *Pet.* 2:3).

It is rather an awful concept – making money out of the crucifixion of Jesus and anxious to get a little bit more for the ministry of the gospel. Paul set his will resolutely against this temptation, which he said other ministers had fallen into. He set his will resolutely in the direction of accepting worsening conditions, hardship, poverty, injustice and exposure to the elements, if his ministry involved these things, and finally accepting the loss of his life in the course of his ministry. If

Christians are to follow Jesus, as Paul did, we must set our wills in the same direction and be willing to accept injustice; for example, to accept with a quiet mind others getting larger salaries and our contemporaries forging past us in worldly circumstances and so on. And if ministers marry, then their wives, too, must share this outlook.

Jesus became poor; he set his will in this direction. But, of course, there was the wonderful strength of knowing that in all his poverty God was with him and (as Jesus himself taught his disciples) God will provide whatever is necessary in the circumstances for those who seek his kingdom. Our experience will be that of the psalmist who had never seen the righteous forsaken nor his seed begging bread (*Ps. 37:25*). God will provide the needs of his servants and the needs of their families.

There is a second point, that Jesus became poor for the sake of other people. He did not choose poverty for its own sake, as though there were some virtue in poverty; neither riches nor poverty commend us to God, though both have their temptations. But Jesus accepted poverty as the way through which he was able to bring blessing to others. 'For your sakes', says Paul, 'he became poor, that you through his poverty might become rich' (*2 Cor. 8:9*). It was not poverty for its own sake, nor was it poverty for the sake of asceticism, as though it would confer benefit on himself, such as strengthening his will, or obtaining merit with God.

Asceticism has no value. The going without for the sake of going without does not strengthen the will, nor is it a sacrifice with which God is pleased. It was for other people's sakes that Jesus became poor. He accepted poverty as part of the condition of bringing benefit to us. For our sakes 'he became poor'. It was out of concern for us that he accepted these disabilities for himself. He found the centre of his life in other people's lives. It was to make us rich beyond all telling

that he accepted poverty for himself. While we were sinners he loved us and gave himself for us.

Paul does not say: 'For God's sake he became poor' but 'for your sakes he became poor'. It is possible to bypass personal relationships by ascribing everything directly to God and his glory. We can impersonalise our lives or our service by saying that we do these things for God's sake. God does not want us to become poor for his sake. We accept poverty (if that is his will for us) simply in the course of our ministering to others. We must be thoroughly concerned with other people's welfare; thoroughly alerted to other people's eternal prospects, so that we give ourselves entirely and completely to serving them. Our becoming poor must flow from our sense of their need and from our ministry to enrich them.

Jesus' ministry had as its object other people and their needs. He came to minister and to give his life a ransom for others. It is possible to be thoroughly orthodox in our Christian opinions and impeccably upright in Christian rectitude without real affection for other people. This is not the way of Jesus. It is true that he drew his strength for his ministry from his love and obedience to his heavenly Father and from fellowship with him and he was conscious of glorifying God in his ministry, but the direction of his ministry was towards other people.

It was because he was full of compassion for others in their godlessness, and in their need of a sense of the awful peril overhanging them through their godlessness, that he gave himself as a good shepherd to win them back to God. He came to save his people. In this he has set us an example. Paul described himself as a slave of the congregation but it was in the context of his relationship to Jesus, and he was their slave for Jesus' sake (2 Cor. 4:5). Our ministry must be motivated by love and concern for others in their predicament and by a sense of the great benefit that the Word of God manifested through us will bring them.

But though our ministry is for others, it must spring out of our relationship with God and our desire to please him. We will not be able to sustain this ministry unless we are very conscious of God's sending us and of the reward and crown which he promises us for faithfulness. Paul was conscious of this crown for, at the end of his life he said, 'I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course. Henceforth is laid up for me the crown of righteousness which, he added, God would give not only to him but to all God's children who live for that heavenly crown, and are looking for the coming of Christ (2 *Tim.* 4:8).

Jesus, too, was conscious of this crown, for it was for 'the joy that was set before him' that he 'endured the cross, despising the shame' (*Heb.* 12:2). His crown is his people's salvation. 'Ask of me', God promised the Messiah, 'and I will give you the heathen for your inheritance and the uttermost parts of the earth for your possession' (*Psa.* 2:8). So, too, we must be conscious of heavenly realities, conscious of the greatness of the hope which, through the gospel, others may enter on, so that we give ourselves completely to this ministry to others' needs; following the example of Jesus who 'though he was rich, yet for our sakes he became poor, that we through his poverty might become rich'.

It is all too possible for us to give merely verbal agreement to the values and realities of heavenly and eternal things, but we must allow these things to affect our decisions and our way of life, setting our wills to accept for example, poverty, if this is involved in our ministry to bring others to a knowledge of Christ and eternal life, so that we, too, will have the crown of eternal fellowship with God and of seeing him face to face. This is true riches.

10

Sex

Sex lies so close to the centre of our being that views on sex will vary with views on man's nature. The Christian view of sex is a sub-section of the Christian view of life. Scripture teaches and experience confirms that the highest good in life is relationship – 'Real life is meeting'.

The Christian view of man is that life has a purpose, namely the establishment of personal fellowship, not only with one another but with God. Such fellowship with God and with those who, in Christ, are in God's presence with us, will transcend the dissolution of the physical body in death.

If we ask ourselves the questions, 'What is the object of life?' and 'What is God's purpose for us throughout eternity?' the answers are that we are created for fellowship – fellowship with one another and fellowship with God. The doctrine of the Trinity shows that there is fellowship within the Godhead itself. We are made in the image of God and, as we grow in fellowship, mutually considering each other in an unselfish way, so we grow into the image of God and grow as persons.

In the account of creation everything is pronounced by God as good with one exception: God said, 'It is not good that man should be alone'. Our natures are made for fellowship. This is God's purpose for us and this purpose is reflected in the way humanity is constituted. Sex is very closely related to this purpose. Each of us finds ourselves to be either a man or a woman and men and women together make up mankind.

Masculinity or femininity is each incomplete in itself, but finds its completeness in personal fellowship between men and women. Men need the companionship of women and women that of men, in order that each one might become completely a human person, a true man or a true woman. Sex relations are both an expression of this fellowship and a means towards its deepening. That is why it is a matter of such intense interest to everyone.

The basic objective in the creation of our sexual nature is the procreation of children. But for humanity this is set in the context of love and fellowship, so that children may be born into the fellowship which there ought to be in every family. So sex has its place in God's purpose for mankind of fellowship and companionship. Although sexual union is not essential for true personal fellowship between men and women, our sexuality serves God's purpose, both by the procreation of children as increasing and continuing the group and, in doing so, adding a dimension to fellowship by the variety of age and relationship in the family; and it also strengthens the growth of fellowship between two people – a man and his wife. Marriage is a normal way for growth in personality through fellowship, that is, through the mutual interdependence of husband and wife. We are, in fact, all mutually interdependent; and it is as an aspect of this interdependence that sexuality has been ordained and that mankind finds itself men and women, a bisexual race.

The basic text for the Christian doctrine of sex is in the first chapter of the Bible (*Gen. 1:27–28*): 'And God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them. And God blessed them: and God said unto them, "Be fruitful and multiply and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the fowls of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth"'. Note the juxtaposition: 'God created man in his own image; male and female created

he them'. God is fellowship within himself – Father, Son and Spirit – and fellowship within mankind is a reflection of the image of God. Masculinity and femininity is a means for the development and strengthening of this human fellowship. Not that there is sexuality within the Godhead or that sexuality will be part of our eternal fellowship. In fact Jesus Christ explicitly teaches that marriage belongs to this age only, as death similarly belongs to this age only (*Lk.* 20:35,36). But our masculinity and femininity bind us in mutual interdependence, and the consequential relationship is a means of personal fellowship. But though relationship is essential, sexual relationship is not, in itself, essential and will be superseded in a higher life.

But we are now concerned with our present experience. God has created us in his own image and this, as so often in the Bible, has a proleptic element. We are to grow into the image; the phrase indicates the purpose set before us. One of the instruments by which men and women can become united into an integrated fellowship of heart and mind, and so become more truly persons through being interdependent and no longer isolated individuals, is sex. This is clearly expressed in Genesis 2:18,23,24: 'And the Lord God said, "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an helpmeet for him . . .". And the man said, "This is now bone of my bones, flesh of my flesh: She shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man." Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife; and they shall be one flesh'.

At the very centre of the biblical interpretation of sex is the brief but important sentence, 'the two shall become one flesh'. In the Bible the word 'flesh' includes the whole personality in its creaturely characteristics, so that 'The two shall become one flesh' points to a unity of the persons. Sexual intercourse is never a passing affair but establishes a relationship between persons. It is a personal activity because it requires

mutuality. As Paul reminded his readers, the individual spouse is not the master of his or her body (*1 Cor. 7:4*). In modern individualism and existentialism the sharing of oneself with another is impossible. Yet this is what sex achieves for a married couple, and it is a remarkable fact of experience that spouses adopt one another's outlook, views and even prejudices, without apparently any necessary convincing argument. On the other hand, modern materialistic humanism, which regards sex simply as a biological function and the other person in sexual activities primarily as a pleasure-yielding body, strengthens rather than transcends egocentric individualism.

Sexual desire is by no means only for physical contact with a person of the opposite sex. Both partners feel the need of the other as persons. They yearn for one another and, through sexual relations, they create an interdependence which extends over the whole life of the two people. This is because sexuality is a quality of the self. In it we understand what it means to be either masculine or feminine and not simply self-sufficient. Sexual intercourse implies knowledge of ourselves as well as knowledge of the other sex. This is not merely physical knowledge but knowledge of persons. It is interesting to note that the Bible speaks of sexual relations by using the phrase 'to know' your wife or husband.

Human relationships are important, but true relationship with God and, consequently, with our fellows, is the supreme importance and the supreme good of life. Personal relationships can be described as knowing a person; thus, to know God and Jesus Christ whom he has sent is eternal life, that is, the full, true, everlasting life (*Jn. 17:3*). Knowing a person may be said to be being in fellowship with a person. And so, as John says, Christians not only have fellowship one with the other but primarily have fellowship with the Father and the Son (*1 Jn. 1:3*). Eternal relationship is the object of creation: restored relationship is the object of the incarnation.

The most intimate human relationship is the relationship of husband and wife. God has created humanity so that neither men nor women constitute humanity but humanity is made up of men and women. This bi-partism of humanity is reflected in the unity of marriage where the two parties, man and wife, form one unit, not merely economic or social but one unit of relationship within themselves as well as in their relations with other people. Sex is this polarity of men and women, and the activities through which sex expresses itself are ways by which the polarity is unified into a single fellowship.

These activities are manifold, ranging from social chatter to the full expression of sexual activity in marriage. Thus the biblical view of sex is that it is the expression of relationship and an instrument of that relationship. It is no accident that the Bible uses the verb 'to know' to describe sexual relations. It is a pity that some modern English versions have failed to notice this, and paraphrase it at a merely physical level. In human sexuality the physical is simply the framework of the personal, and physical union a way to express and deepen that personal fellowship and union which the word 'know' is the best single word to describe.

When it is realised that sex is the expression of personal relationship and the means of personal development through the growth of fellowship, some interesting facts associated with sex will be intelligible; for example, the natural reticence which surrounds our speaking of sex. This is not, as is sometimes thought, a false guilt complex, for it still remains true, even for those who are fully conscious that their sexual relationships have become established at a pure level. It is the reticence naturally associated with the sharing of our inmost personality; for sex goes close to the centre of personality. The same consideration explains the natural modesty which is associated with sex and is to be noticed even in young children and is also reflected in the language of antiquity as well as the language of Christendom.

When we see that the purpose of sex is that it should be a means to the fulfilment of personality through creative relationship, we have a criterion to test lawful, or illicit, sexual activities. Since mutual consent is a prerequisite to all personal actions, rape, or the lascivious word or look or touch, being one-sided and not intended to lead to a relationship, are an invasion of personality and an act of dishonour to a person. But consent is not the only consideration; prostitution, although involving consent, is reprehensible because both the woman who sells her body and the man who uses it treat her as a thing and not as a person.

Sex activities which cannot lead to the development of personal relationships in the unity of man and woman in one flesh are rightly recognised as perversions. Of course, not all such activities are equally abominable, but all have the same characteristic, namely that the use sex is put to cannot possibly lead to the fulfilment of the purpose of our sexuality, namely the growth in personality through a growing unity in fellowship. Thus perversions isolate one aspect of sex, the physically pleasurable, and pursue it for its own sake, disregarding the development of personal unity. Yet sex is rooted deep in our personality and this is why a misuse of our sexual nature has more disruptive effects on our personality and fills psychiatric consulting rooms in a way misuse of other bodily appetites does not. For they are not, as sex is, designed primarily for personal fellowship.

Similarly, pre-marital relationships, though not perversions, are a misuse of sex as they are not intended to lead to the fulfilment of our sexuality, either in the begetting of children in the fellowship of the husband-wife relationship or the deepening of fellowship in the growing unity of the marriage bond. They misuse the unity of the flesh in the pursuit of one of its concomitants, that is physical pleasure. Yet we all know that physical sensations never fulfil what they promise. Happiness is a will-o'-the-wisp. It cannot be

pursued directly. It is, however, experienced in true relationships of persons.

This explains one of the interesting characteristics of sexual pleasure, namely that 'in a really successful partnership sexual pleasure normally continues to increase in both parties throughout married life'.¹ This admission by an atheistic humanist points to the important fact that there is not only more pleasure obtained by using sex according to its purpose, but also that, unless we do this, the real depths of pleasure that are possible in sex are unobtainable. Thus the libertine who pursues pleasure in sex for its own sake, flitting from partner to partner, by this very action rules out the possibility of fulfilment. On the other hand, when the use of sex is kept within its purpose of monogamous marriage it not only yields pleasure increasingly but, more importantly, it also achieves personal fellowship, without which no happiness is possible. The happiness God intends us to experience is ours only when we keep within the purposes of our nature.

Time is the great enemy of the physical, but when sex is used within its purposes personal fellowship grows. Love deepens over the years and supplies a truer satisfaction as the physical wanes, so that fidelity is the key to the problem of the passage of time, that enemy of physical pleasure.

Our body is that part of ourselves through which our personality expresses itself and it is the instrument of self-giving by which a man or a woman learns to reflect the pattern of the self-giving of God. When children are born into the family this simply extends the scope of self-giving and provides the possibility of growth of personal relations. Children widen the fellowship and introduce another aspect, and a new opportunity for overcoming our self-centredness. Fidelity in monogamous marriage, with its opportunities of mutual giving and receiving, with sex as the background, is a

¹A. Comfort, *Sex and Society*, p. 88.

means by which we grow as persons and, in doing so, enjoy the life we have been given.

Naturally, then, the Bible regards divorce as a radical contradiction of the purpose of sex and marriage, though it recognises that, because of sin and hardness of heart, it may, in some circumstances, be the only way out (*Matt. 19:3-8*).

The most conspicuous feature about sex is the inordinate interest it arouses, and this reminds us that our personal relations, both with one another and with God, have been fundamentally disturbed by selfishness and sin. Sin erodes fellowship. Naturally enough this disturbance in our personality affects our sexual nature, because sex is so closely related to personal values and fellowship.

Personal fellowship can be restored only by genuine forgiveness. Fellowship with God is restored by the forgiveness which God extends freely to all who turn back to him through Christ. Forgiveness calms the uneasy conscience and restores personal relations with God. It is worth noting that God – who is the offended party – takes the initiative in drawing us back to himself. Similarly, forgiveness is basic in the restoring of fellowship in marriage, when this has been disturbed. But in this case the turning towards each other and the forgiveness must be mutual, as it is almost certain that both spouses have a share of the blame.

In the Bible, God's dealing with us is the model for our dealing with one another. Thus, ideal human marriage is a reflection of God's purpose for the divine-human relationship. The church, that is Christians as a fellowship, are described as the bride of Christ, and from this is deduced the principle that husbands are to treat their wives as Christ the church: 'Husbands, love your wives even as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for it' (*Eph. 5:25*).

The Bible teaches that marriage is modelled on Christ's relationship to the church, just as this, in turn, is modelled on the relationship with the divine Trinity of Father, Son and

Holy Spirit. Similarly, mating in animals is modelled on that of man, and so on down to the lowest level of life. From an evolutionary way of looking at things, this Bible view is the wrong way round. We start at the bottom and work up. Yet the Bible's view is the only logical viewpoint, once we admit the concept of purpose, for then the final result controls and explains all the more elementary stages which precede it. Purpose controls process (just as the purpose of erecting a certain type of building controls what goes on in the drawing office and on the site) and, of course, the concept of purpose is inalienable from belief in the existence of a personal God.

God's purpose for mankind is that we should grow as persons, which means growing in relationship with each other. Marriage is a crucible for this and, like all God's gifts, is a happy one; but our happiness will not be full nor our relationship stable unless we are also in fellowship with him, to which forgiveness in Christ is the gateway.

Marriage is for this life, but the fellowship it engenders is intended for ever, to merge into the deeper fellowship of eternity. In this life marriage deepens fellowship by restricting it. But in heaven fellowship will be deep and universal, for the physical will have been superseded. And since the fellowship with God and with one another will then be perfect, the happiness will be complete.

SEXUAL MORALITY

It is an interesting fact that sex differs from all other human activities in having its own rules; that is, it has its own special morality. The morality of all other human actions is comprised within two simple rules. Firstly, you should not injure yourself or act contrary to your physical and emotional nature; for example, you should not take drugs or mutilate your body or commit suicide. And, secondly, your action should not injure other people but should forward the

welfare of others on whom your action impinges. Every action which does not transgress either of these two rules is freely within your own decision. To take a simple illustration, you are entitled to go for a swim whenever you like so long as:

1. You do not endanger your health; and
2. You do not injure other people by, for example, neglecting duties and obligations you may have towards them.

Similarly, with regard to eating. You may eat what you like so long as you do not injure your health and you do not eat other people's food. But sexual activity differs from other activities in that it has one additional rule besides these other two.

This third rule is summarised by the word 'fidelity'. In other words, sex is permissible only within the marriage relationship. This is a very interesting phenomenon, that sexual morality has this third rule and so is differentiated from all our other activities, which have two rules only. Sex, of course, comes under these two rules, but has its own rule as well. Within these three rules sex is free, for our own decision, just as all other actions are free for our own decision within two rules.

The Bible teaches this third rule of sex quite clearly in the story of creation, where it is said that a husband shall cleave to his wife and they shall become one. Fidelity is the principle underlying this.

Nature itself confirms this principle. This is shown by a survey of morality as reflected in human society and customs, pagan as well as Christian. Marriage is for life. Unfaithfulness is condemned. What nature itself reflects Scripture abundantly confirms. Sex is for marriage. Fornication, unfaithfulness, perversions, lasciviousness, lewd talk are constantly condemned in the Bible, and those who give

themselves to them are explicitly said to be excluded from God's kingdom, for such use of our sexual nature is contrary to the mind and character of God.

Paul has put this third rule of fidelity, under which all sexual morality can be summarised, very clearly and on a firmer base than the simple word 'fidelity' when he says in I Corinthians 7:4 that a husband has no authority over his own body but only his wife has that authority and, similarly, a wife has no authority over her own body but only her husband. Paul is talking in the context of sexual actions; we have authority over our own bodies for general actions so long as we do not contravene the two rules of not injuring ourselves and not injuring other people. Thus we can use our bodies for sun-bathing just as we like, so long as we keep the two rules, but we cannot use our bodies in a sexual way according to our own whim, for authority over our body in this area belongs to our spouse according to Paul – a very interesting and true concept.

This concept that only our spouse has the right to unlock our sexual nature means, for example, that sex before marriage is excluded, as well as all homosexual acts. The rule also excludes lewd jokes among our workmates, because here is a unilateral use of our own nature in a sexual way, using it simply according to our own decision, following our own whims, and not using it in the context of relationship with our spouse. We may act on our own in all other actions, but according to the Scripture our sexual nature is only to be used in relationship with our spouse, to be unlocked, so to speak, by our spouse or, as Paul put it, 'the husband has no authority over his body except his wife, and the wife has no authority over her body except her husband'. Our body is not to be used unilaterally for sexual satisfaction.

Sex is unique amongst all human activities in having this third rule, that sexual activity is to be engaged in only in the context of mutual fidelity. This concept controls pre-marital

sex as much as marital sex. The concept requires a distinction between actions which are expressions of affection, such as holding hands and kissing, and actions which are primarily sexual, such as coition.

Humanists and others vigorously advocate sexual permissiveness in all aspects of sex, pre-marital, extra-conjugal, homosexual. What, in effect, they are saying is that sex does not have this third rule but is like every other human action in that it is controlled only by the general rules of morality, namely that you ought not to injure yourself or injure other people by your actions. If sex is placed under these two rules only it becomes as free as any other action is, such as swimming or eating or sun-bathing and, as a consequence, marriage, the home and the family become outmoded, for these are all based on the concept and restraint of fidelity, that is, that our sexual nature is only to be unlocked by our spouse. Sexual permissiveness is simply the denial that sex has this third rule. If, however, sex differs from all other human activity in that it has its own third rule of morality, then this principle is to be applied to all sexual activities both before and after marriage. All sexual morality is summed up by this simple rule of mutual fidelity, that a man has no authority over his own body sexually, but his wife; and that a wife has no authority over her own body sexually, but her husband. Of course, in using this authority both husband and wife are bound by the other two rules, especially the rule that no action is ever permissible that is unfair to the other person.

It ought to be noted that this principle of sexual morality is not only found in Christianity. It is to be found universally among mankind as any acquaintance with, for example, the primitive animistic society of the Solomon Islands of the present day or a knowledge of the literature of pre-Christian antiquity will readily confirm. Mankind has always known that marriage is for life and that fidelity in marriage is the

expected thing – it is an ordinance of God written in the heart.

The sexual permissiveness of the present time is unique in human history. There have often been periods of social immorality in the past, but never before has there been an articulate and coherent section of the community which seeks to argue logically and scientifically that sex has no third rule of its own, but is to be used, as we like, within the general rules of morality.

In conclusion, it may be asked why sex differs from other actions in having its own special rule in addition to the general rules which govern behaviour. Only the Christian can answer this and the Bible gives the answer that our sex nature has been created for relationship and to reflect our relationship to God: 'The body is for the Lord' (*1 Cor. 6:13*). Our sexual natures are intended to express and deepen personal relationship in the context of the generation and procreation of children. This reflects on the physical plane what is our relationship on the spiritual with God our Creator and Christ our Redeemer.

Understood from this point of view it is easy to see the consistency and the sublimity of the biblical teaching about sex. And although this is written in the heart of mankind even beyond Christian revelation, it only finds its explanation and justification and full exposition in Holy Scripture. In the clear light of Scripture we need to affirm that man will be truly happy only if he uses his nature in accordance with God's rule of fidelity, which explains all sexual morality, namely that the spouse alone has power over the sexual life. This is the way God has made us and this is the way, therefore, our society should organise itself.

11

Women's Lib

The leaders of the Women's Liberation Movement (Women's Lib for short) direct attention to what they regard as the inequalities and injustices which our society inflicts on women. If these statements are true it is a matter which directly concerns Christians, for Christians must always be alert to any injustices and be active in redressing them, because God is eminently just and righteous. All his dealings with us are on the basis of what is right and just and fair and he requires that all our dealings with one another should be on the same basis. Justice, fairness and righteousness are the only possible basis for peace between nations or true relationships between people. Christians must always be anxious to forward justice and to redress injustice.

Christians are especially interested in the status of women in the community, because it is the Christian religion which has done so much for women. Jesus set the example – women shared his friendship and accompanied him on his preaching journeys. Then the great apostle Paul taught very clearly that there is to be no inequality between men and women. In Galatians 3:28 he said that 'in Christ there is no male nor female, but all are one' and again, in I Corinthians 11:11, he pointed out the exact equality between the sexes.

This was a great change from what he had thought before he became a Christian, which may be illustrated from *The Jewish Prayer Book*. Right to modern times *The Jewish*

Prayer Book has a prayer for men to say, 'Lord, I thank you that you did not make me a woman'. (Women say, 'I thank you that you made me according to your will'). This was the prayer Paul and all the apostles would have prayed constantly before they became followers of Jesus. You will see what a profound change the Christian religion has created in our sense of relationship between the sexes. This change can be illustrated further by looking around the modern world to see how women fare in non-Christian countries, for example in the Mohammedan countries or, again, by reminding ourselves of the servile state of womankind in the ancient European world of Greece and Rome. In those cultures they were never allowed to take any part in society.

It is the Christian religion which has been the charter of women's rights, because the Christian religion teaches us to serve one another and not to seek our own interests at other people's expense, whether 'bossing' it over others or even demanding equality in a self-centred way. Jesus said, 'I am among you as one that serves'; both his life and death were on behalf of other people. It was in terms of service that he saw his crucifixion: 'The Son of Man . . .' he said ' . . . came not to be served by others but to serve them and to give his life a ransom for many' (*Mk. 10:45*). This is the character of God – 'I am among you as one who serves' – and by the Holy Spirit's power we Christians are able to reflect the same spirit.

The Women's Liberation Movement will never succeed in reaching its goals because it ignores the fact that mankind is sinful. The problem to which Women's Lib addresses itself arises from a two-fold fact. Firstly, men and women are sinful and therefore self-centred and are not primarily interested in justice to other people so much as in forwarding their own interests. The second fact is that the male sex is stronger physically and perhaps more self-sufficient emotionally. As men are physically stronger, and also selfish (as are all men and women who are not under the influence of

God's Spirit) it follows naturally – and we see this in every non-Christian country – that women are the drudges. Physical strength coupled with unrestrained self-centredness means that the weak get the raw deal. Women's Lib ignores these facts which can only be overcome by the Christian ideal of humbly serving one another.

However, Women's Lib, ignoring the fact of sin and selfishness and the need for the antidote of humility, proceeds on the antithetical method of *demanding* things. The two most conspicuous of these demands are promiscuity in sex and abortion on demand. It is absurd for Women's Lib to think that these two things are going to advance equality for women. They have both been tried before. In the ancient Greek and Roman world, from which our civilization stems, promiscuity was an accepted thing, but it was the women who suffered. So, too, the destruction of infant human life, when it was regarded as an inconvenience, was widely condoned. But this did not elevate women's status. On the contrary, mothers had to destroy their infants if their husband did not want to raise the child and this same influence exists today in the promotion of abortion with the same emotional trauma for the mother.

If the way chosen is by demanding rights and so on, then men will always be out in front as they have more muscle power behind their demands. This has been and is the case in every non-Christian society. But the Christian way is not by demanding things for ourselves but by considering one another and serving one another. Promiscuity does not enhance the status of women nor does abortion on demand. These things depress the status of wives and mothers and provide them with all sorts of mental anguish.

Women's Lib attacks Christianity, but it is women who are often the chief sufferers when these attacks succeed in our society.

The leaders of this movement are determined that women

should be equal with men in the pursuit of selfish liberty. To achieve this they advocate the destruction of human life when it gets in the way of one's own convenience. There is all the difference in the world between deciding not to start a human life and the decision to destroy it, which is abortion. Women's Lib will ultimately fail, though it may do a great deal of damage to our Christian society in the meanwhile if it is not checked.

Women's Lib ignores the facts of sinfulness on the one hand, which needs not slogans but the gospel to cure, and it ignores, on the other hand, the differences which make the sexes complementary. Certainly men and women are equal, but they are not the same in physical build or, indeed, in psychological response, nor perhaps even in styles of mental thought. The mistake of Women's Lib is to think that equality means being identical and the same in every respect, so that if there are differences of life-style and occupation this is said to be inequality. But it is plain that women are different from men, if only in that they have weaker biceps. But this does not mean that they are unequal. They become unequal when the superior muscles are used selfishly to depress the weaker, instead of used in a Christian way to serve the weaker. The Christian way is that men and women should use their different gifts to advance each other's true interests and happiness in an open society of mutual respect, serving one another and honouring one another.

The attempt to achieve equality by making demands for oneself springs from a sinful character and is bound to fail. For when everyone is selfishly making demands, the strongest gets the lot!

Women's Lib will do us all a service if it directs our attention to the way we treat each other, for we are all subject to sin. For example, are husbands really acting in a Christian manner in the home, or are they being self-centred? Again, are they giving their company to their wives or do they go off

to the pub for the whole evening with their cronies? Are husbands sharing the chores of the home in a fair and just way? Do they take their proper place in training and teaching the children, or do they leave all this burden to the wife? These things are to be shared each according to the gifts of nature which God has given us.

We Christians should be teaching positively that there is no place for injustice and unfairness between the sexes and that laziness and indolence must never have any place in the home or outside. Men and women must share together the burdens, as well as share together the joys and rewards of human life. We Christians must teach this and also teach that there is the possibility for all to achieve this by the power of God in Jesus Christ. Indeed, we must not only teach this but set the example by living it out.

12

Censorship

It is worthwhile reflecting on the whole matter of censorship. Today we live in a permissive society. Not, of course, permissive in everything, not permissive, for example, in stealing or assault or drug taking, but there is growing permissiveness in sexual immorality, in abortion, in gambling and in alcoholic liquor. It has not always been so. For example, fifty years ago most gambling was forbidden and hotel trading was severely limited, and public displays of sexual immorality on the stage or cinema or in books were completely prohibited and, of course, abortion was a crime. These things were restricted or forbidden because they were regarded as harmful to happiness. Were we mistaken in the past, or is it the new attitude that is mistaken?

We cannot make a community obey God by censorship and we should not attempt to do so. This is the area for Christian witness and example to set positive values, and to raise community standards. But quite apart from Christian considerations, every community has a right to maintain community standards. Individuals who are members of the community and who are not under any obligation to remain members have no right to use their membership in a way that is offensive to others. Take a simple illustration. No-one objects to a person taking off his clothes in his own home but do we not rightly object if he tries to undress in the street? Has he a right to do this? The present law forbids him. Is this

unbearable censorship? I have never heard it suggested. Yet he is doing no harm to anyone except being offensive.

The principle underlying our present laws is that you and I have a right to walk in the public street or sit in the public park without having offensive behaviour by individual members of the community thrust under our notice. Public areas have to be shared, and so there has to be a restraint on unfettered libertinism – this is the principle of life in community. The same principle applies equally to broadcasts, the public press, the public bookstand and public billboards and advertisements designed for the public to read. Why should individuals who wish to make money make use of their membership of the community when they have no intention of keeping within community standards? The community has the right to ensure that the offensive word, or scene, or poster is not peddled through community facilities.

The new attitude to censorship, however, is often generalised in such terms that the law does not interfere with people's private acts, whether these are homosexual or pornographic or gambling or abortion, and so on. But this is a false principle. It is true that society should not interfere with the personal liberty of its members in matters which are harmless, but society has a right to prohibit even private acts which are harmful, although the harm may be only to the perpetrator of the act.

None of us lives to himself. Society is affected by all its members, so it has a right to protect its members, even against themselves. For example, at present the state legislates in areas of private morality where harm is being done. This is why it prohibits heroin. The taking of drugs is a private activity and directly harms no-one but the drug taker, yet the state does not allow people to sell drugs to each other, or even to possess drugs. Here is a plain case where the law takes account of private acts of morality because these are harmful to the person doing them.

If reading or seeing certain literature is harmful to the person who sees it or reads it society has a right, and indeed duty, to restrict this action by censorship. The idea that the state should not interfere in private morality, although very popular these days, is a false principle, and its falseness can be seen immediately when we think of the illicit drug trade. Selling drugs and taking drugs are private acts between consenting adults, but society prohibits these actions because of the damage the drug taker is doing to himself.

It is easy to see the damage that drugs do, because this damage is physical. It is not so easy to see what is the injury that salacious thoughts and lustful habits do to a person who indulges in them, because these affect not his physical but rather his psychic and mental life. Yet we all know that happiness is more dependent on our psychological health than on our physical health. A person who is happily related to his wife and family and to his friends can put up with physical pain and physical disabilities without losing his happiness, but a perfectly healthy person who is at odds with himself, devoid of friends and in strife at home, is unhappy, so much so that he may be driven to suicide.

Injury that is done to our psyche and to our relationships with others is more devastating, yet much harder to pinpoint, than injury to our physical well-being. It is in the areas of human relationships that obscenity and pornography do their damage. Our sexual life and our sexual feelings are vehicles for establishing true relationship and if this side of our life becomes twisted in its development by pornography or homosexuality, we will not be able to relate properly to other people and so the chief object of life and its main source of joy will be denied us, even though our bodies remain perfectly healthy.

God's Word uniformly condemns dirty talk, filthy jesting and impure actions. We are not to allow our minds to meditate on these subjects. Our natural instincts indicate the

same. Paul referred to the shame of even speaking of the things that some of his contemporaries did in secret (*Eph. 5:12*). This reference to secrecy is interesting, for it shows that even pagan society recognises that obscenity is wrong and needs to be shrouded with secrecy.

Again we ask the question, 'Why is it wrong?', for God's Word does not condemn things which are harmless. Its evil lies in the misuse of the means of fellowship and social relationship with our fellow men and women, and particularly with our spouse, so as to prevent proper development of this fellowship. However, the truest joys of life are to be found in such relationships and it is God's beneficent purpose for mankind that we should be related, both to one another and to him, in true personal fellowship. Obscene habits of mind and licentious behaviour hinder the development of proper relationships.

Society is concerned to preserve the good life of its members, and therefore society is bound to provide barriers of censorship against actions and literature and films which will twist the thoughts and the character so as to prevent the development of true and happy fellowship and personal relationship with other people.

This principle of protection from exploitation has a special bearing on our obligation to the developing personalities of young people within the community. Every parent recognises that obligations to the children in the home may impose requirements and, perhaps, restrictions on their time and activities. The community as a whole has obligations to young people growing up and forming their personalities and their habits. Thus we restrict the sale of alcohol to young persons under a certain age lest they become addicts before they learn to discriminate; we restrict their right of entering into binding contracts lest their immaturity might betray them into being held to actions which they might later regret.

We all have a serious duty to help young people form their minds and characters in a way that will bring them joy and happiness. A criminal character or a depraved taste will not do this. A distorted personality is a terrible curse to take through life.

With regard to the censorship of obscene literature, there are three positions that can be taken. One is that a person should be allowed to read or see in private as much obscenity and pornography as he chooses. A second possible position is that censorship should reflect current community standards. And the third possible position, which is the traditional position, is that censorship should act as a brake against tendencies which are harmful to the community. It is, of course, impossible for a democratically based government to legislate directly against the wishes of the people. Christians and Christian ministers should be indefatigable in educating people as to what is the right attitude in these matters. Nevertheless, the government ought to act slowly rather than go along with the vociferous members of the crowd; much less should it be in advance of the crowd.

Everything, of course, depends on whether obscenity is harmful to the individual. If it is not then there should be no censorship at all. But God's Word and the natural heart confirm that it is harmful, and reflection will show the reason, namely that obscenity misuses sex in a way which stultifies its purpose of being the basis of true natural relationships between people in society. If our thoughts are twisted in a dirty, obscene way we cannot have natural, spontaneous fellowship between the sexes on the one hand or within the family on the other, and especially between man and wife. Fellowship requires respect for one another and a man habituated to obscene ways of thinking cannot suddenly begin to respect the other person as a person. This is the evil of obscenity and this is why society should restrict obscenity as far as it is able.

As well as upholding laws affecting public morality Christians will act as their own censors for their own lives. The Christian seeks to please his Saviour, to win from the lips of his Master the praise, 'Well done, good and faithful servant, enter thou into the joy of thy Lord'. As Paul puts it, the Christian is compared to a soldier whose object is to please him who enrolled him (*2 Tim. 2:4*). Our first duty, then, is to immerse ourselves in the mind of God so that we may understand what God commands and love what he approves. We should know what the Scriptures say, the standards they set before us, the values they commend, and we should regulate all our actions by the rule of God's mind revealed in Scripture. God is love, God is righteous, God is holy and pure. These are the things of which we should approve; we should assimilate ourselves to these. We should not find our entertainment in reading or seeing things which cannot be classified under these headings, but which contradict them, because we can be assured that such things do not have God's approval. As Paul writes to the Philippians, 'Whatever is true, whatever is honourable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is gracious, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things' (*Phil. 4:8*). This is the principle which should control the Christian in his choice of what he reads or what he views.

The Christian finds himself in a world in which Christ was crucified, a world under the influence of the evil one, a world still awaiting its redemption and its judgment at the coming of Christ. Jesus said to his disciples and he says to us, 'Ye are the light of the world' (*Matt. 5:14*). We have the commission to show, in our lives and actions, his character of love, sympathy, understanding, on the one hand and yet, on the other hand, his character of light in which there is no darkness at all. We must bear witness to the light and in our actions discriminate, setting aside, in our

reading and in our viewing, things which contradict God's character and which would dishonour his name in us were we to participate in them or to take our entertainment from them.

13

Sunday

The setting apart of one day in the week for religious observance is based on the Bible; it is not practised in non-biblical religions. Unfortunately many of our community who call themselves Christians do not recognise any obligation to find out or to follow the mind of God on this matter, and think that they are at liberty to do what they like with regard to the observance of Sunday.

Two points should be made here: the first is that everyone is under the obligation to do the will of God. Even if a man rejects this obligation, that does not reduce his obligation in the slightest. Even if a man rejects the will of God, he remains God's creature and, as such, we all are duty bound to honour and acknowledge God. It is plain that we are self-condemned if we enjoy God's created world and yet feel free to disobey his will in the way we use and enjoy that world. Everyone has an absolute obligation to conform to the will of God, and this obligation is not altered by whether or not we acknowledge the obligation.

The second point is that Christians have a duty to witness and testify to what the will of God is, and to exhort and urge their fellow citizens to conform their way of life to God's will. Christians have been given the privilege of knowing the mind of God through Scripture, and through the Holy Spirit who dwells in their hearts. Christians are witnesses to Christ and

to his will. This was his last command to them, 'You shall be my witnesses' (*Acts 1:8*).

The Christian duty to witness to the will of God is not in the slightest degree affected by the fact that Christians may be in a minority in the community. Of course in a democracy it is impossible for a minority to enforce its will on the majority; but it is not a question of Christians enforcing their will on their fellows, whether in a minority or a majority, but of conforming to God's will, by which everyone is bound.

The Christian duty is that of witness, and for this minority it still remains a duty to witness clearly and unswervingly to the mind of God as he has revealed it to us in Scripture. For example, John the Baptist was in a minority of one when he told the king, 'It is not lawful for you to have your brother's wife' (*Mk. 6:18*). He lost his head for this; but as a servant of God he had no alternative but to testify clearly to the will of God in the situation.

So, too, with Sunday observance; God has revealed his mind in Scripture. Everyone has an obligation to obey that will, and, where it is disobeyed, Christians who know that the Bible is the Word of God have an unchanging duty to testify to what God's will in the matter is and to call upon the whole community to conform to it. The fact that they may be a majority or a minority is irrelevant.

If we turn to the question, 'How should Sunday be observed?' we will note that the day of rest is first referred to in Genesis chapter 2. The Genesis account tells of creation in six days; the seventh day God hallowed for himself, resting on it. The important fact in the matter we are considering is that the Holy Spirit has given us the account of our created world in a 6-day/1-day form.

What is the purpose of this? Doubtless creation could have been completed in one day had that been the will of God. The 6-day/1-day form was chosen by God for our benefit and instruction. It is a pattern written right into the texture of the

created world in this account in Genesis. We read that God rested on the seventh day and hallowed it; that is to say, he made it specially his own. This action and the account of it was for our sake, in order that we might follow his pattern. Consequently Sunday is to be a day of rest, but more importantly it is to be a day hallowed to God, for we read: 'God blessed the seventh day and hallowed it', that is, made it God's day.

The most important thing for any man or woman to do is to honour God and we should set aside Sunday as a day on which we honour God by strengthening our faith in him. Of course every day is God's day, but unless we set aside one day regularly we are not likely to hallow any day. We know the same experience in prayer. It is true that we should pray always, but unless we make specific times for prayer we will finish up, not by praying always but by praying never. So, too, every day should be hallowed and consecrated to God, but unless we set aside one day in particular, in which we can exercise ourselves in religious thought and worship, we will finish up without hallowing any day, and never thinking about God. That this is true is only too plain in our present community.

When we remember that the honouring of God is the first principle for a healthy community, the hallowing of one day a week as especially God's is a most important community activity. For unless we exercise ourselves in godliness we will find that we will be overwhelmed by worldliness. Unless we rest from our ordinary activities in order to honour God, our Creator and Redeemer, on his day, we will find that the whole of our life, and not just the one day, will become godless. A desecrated Sunday results in a godless community.

So then, how should we observe Sunday? Firstly, it is a day for physical rest and refreshment, not only in our bodies but in our personalities, in the company of our friends and

family. But more importantly it is a day of renewing our fellowship with God, because we are not only bodies but we are primarily spiritual persons.

We should use Sunday to hallow God's name in our own hearts and lives; we should honour God for what he is to us. Firstly, we recall creation, for that is when the day of rest was established. God is our Creator and we are dependent on him.

Secondly, we should recall our redemption. In the Old Testament the Sabbath was especially associated with God's covenant with his people. He promised that he would be their God and that they would be his people. The Sabbath was a sign of this. In the New Testament, Sunday was the day on which the Lord Jesus rose from the dead and on which the Holy Ghost was given. It is called 'the Lord's day' in the New Testament, showing that it is especially associated with Jesus Christ. We should use the opportunities the day provides to worship him.

And, thirdly, Sunday is not only a day to remind us of our dependence on God our Creator and of our redemption through Christ, but also a day to remind us to look forward to that final rest which God will provide at the coming of Jesus Christ. Christians should be forward looking, and Sunday is a weekly reminder of our future hope in the coming of our Lord. For we live by hope, and Sunday, as a day of rest, should encourage us to look to God's promised rest.

So the day reminds us of God's triple provision for mankind: creation, redemption and future blessing. It is the duty of everybody to repent and believe these great truths of the gospel. It is the duty of Christians to express their belief and to refresh their faith by the weekly hallowing of one day to God. We live in a community which mostly ignores these divine obligations. This fact is no reason for Christians to weaken their witness; on the contrary it is a call to be clearer than ever as to the duty of Sunday observance by all.

How each of us should observe the day in detail is not explained in the New Testament. The details of Sunday observance are left to conscience and the sincere desire to glorify God. It is no ordinary day. In Genesis, God set it aside as his day in order that we might follow his example. In Revelation it is called 'the Lord's day' (*Rev. 1:10*). So we should use the day to refresh ourselves in God.

Trust in our heavenly Father is the essence of our fellowship with God, and Sunday is an opportunity for deepening this trust, thanking him for nature around us which he has created, thanking him for forgiveness in Christ, believing that 'he who spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him freely give us all things?' (*Rom. 8:32*) and thanking him for the sure hope of the future.

We grow in faith through prayer and through reading God's Word. Sunday is especially an opportunity for this, through public worship and private prayer and Bible study and for those of us who have families it also provides an opportunity for instructing the children.

We should be alert to preserve Sunday, writing to members of parliament if there is any attempt to erode Sunday by legislation. But chiefly we should pray that we, as well as our fellow citizens, might learn how best to use the Lord's day to his honour and our benefit.

14

War

A passion for righteousness is something we have largely lost sight of in our modern society. The Old and New Testaments are full of a passion for righteousness, for right relationships, for right dealings, for rendering to everyone what is due, rendering to God what is due to God, and to our neighbour what is due to him.

A passion for righteousness may call us to war. Righteousness may well involve anger, but it never involves the hating of your enemy in a vindictive sense. Regard for righteousness involves anger against unrighteousness. In Romans 1:18 we read of the anger of God revealed against all unrighteousness of men.

Anger is compatible with love, but only with holy love: that is, a love which hates unrighteousness and iniquity and which shrinks from it with that instantaneous reaction Christ had when he said to his friend Peter, 'Get thee behind me, Satan, thou savourest not the things of God . . .'. This intense and holy passion for righteousness has nowadays been largely lost among Christians. We need to ask the Spirit of God to teach us the mind of God with regard to righteousness, because otherwise we fall into the quagmire of sentimental love. Sentimental love which does not differentiate – a love which has no principles – is the curse of our modern society. This is absolutely foreign to the New

Testament and the Old. God is love and God is righteous; there is no contradiction between the two.

Love must always be righteous. God's holy love is seen in his holy righteousness on the cross: 'He spared not his own Son but delivered him up for us all' (*Rom. 8:32*). At Calvary pain and suffering and death were accepted, indeed inflicted, by God to achieve righteousness. The cross was an action of love. But it was holy love, not sentimental love which does not differentiate between right and wrong, justice and injustice, good and evil.

Every sensible, responsible adult regards war as horrid, but undifferentiated dislike of war is not the Christian attitude. The Christian must hate with an intense hatred unrighteousness and accept, if necessary, suffering and, indeed, inflict it as God inflicted it on his Son, in vindication of righteousness. To think that freedom from pain and injury is the great aim in life is to have lost all sense of the supernatural dimension of life and, indeed, all sense of moral values. Our modern society ignores or denies that man is a being of two worlds, the supernatural as well as the natural, and that he lives by values which transcend the natural order. Typical modern thought cannot avoid wrong conclusions because it abstracts from the whole merely a part, and bases its judgments on this part, ignoring the rest of reality.

War is to be undertaken only as an act of righteousness and judgment. God delegates to men his supreme right to judge in certain circumstances. We have not *all* got the duty to judge, but this office is delegated to some, for example parents who have a duty to judge the behaviour of their children. Private persons have received from God no right or duty to judge one another and we are not to usurp this office. God is ultimately the only Judge and he alone has the right to judge, for he is our Creator and we are all created, as it were, tenants-in-chief to God. In his long-suffering God has postponed judgment for our sins for the time being to

provide us with the opportunity for salvation. Otherwise, if God entered into judgment with us we would all be condemned and finished.

Meanwhile, in the long-suffering of God, and for the preservation of society, he has delegated to persons holding institutional positions his right of judgment and it then becomes their duty to discharge it conscientiously. It is no mere option, which is why Paul says in Romans 13 that the magistrate is the minister of God. In this the apostle was echoing the Old Testament: 'The judgment is God's' (*Deut. 1:17*), 'He said to the judges . . . "you judge not for man but for the Lord"' (*2 Chron. 9:6*).

Unless the magistrate is acting as God's delegate he has no right even to lay an arresting hand on a person, a fellow man created in God's image. Nor have we any right to judge one another unless we are acting in God's name. Judgment administered by men may, of course, be very inexact, because of their sin and blindness and ignorance; nevertheless the administrator of justice is ultimately acting on God's behalf.

The ultimate sanction of the magistrate in the community is the sword (*Rom. 13:4*) that is to say, force, and the ultimate sanction of international justice is war. We all hope that, through the establishment of other less drastic methods of international justice, the time may soon come when the sword of war will very seldom have to be unsheathed, but at present it is the only method. It may well be that a nation has an obligation to vindicate righteousness in the community of nations and it may be able to do so only by war, at the present juncture.

It is not right for the magistrate to let individuals do as they like in the community; and it is also not right, if it is the duty of a particular nation to enter into an obligation to fight for right relations amongst nations, to neglect to do so. The question of when there is a duty to enter into a war is a

difficult one and it will be resolved for any nation by a consideration of such things as its commitments, its obligations and its ability to help but, basically, underlying all, is the fact that, if your brother is suffering wrongfully and needs your help and if you are in a position to give it, it is your duty to help. So in quarrels between the nations you must ask: 'Where does the right lie, if anywhere? What is my obligation to that right?' The painfulness of war is not an ultimate reason for refraining from it. A nation may have to engage in it until we can develop better forms of international tribunals.

There is, however, this difference between the magistrates' use of the sword and war, in that war is not primarily an act of retributive justice, though ultimately it must be grounded on this principle. The conquest of Canaan by the Israelites was an exception in that retribution was not only its ground but also its objective. The extermination of the Amorites was retribution for their iniquity and the Israelites received a clear command to this effect. But normally war, when undertaken in the cause of righteousness, is not undertaken primarily to kill people. It is undertaken to deter nations from actions they ought not to be doing. If a person is doing an unjust act it may be your duty to restrain him. This is the question to be faced; not how painful it is to him or you.

In seeking to understand the Christian attitude to war we need to ask if righteousness is something God maintains and if he calls on us to maintain it also. We are to have hostility in our own hearts to unrighteousness so that we hate it in the same severe way that God does. A passion for righteousness has no place for vindictiveness against the person, but it does make you hate the unjust action intensely and it may require you to act in such a way that other people say you hate the person, because it may require you to engage in horrible war against him.

The involvement of the relatively innocent with the guilty is inseparable from war and, although this should prompt us to energetic striving to achieve more efficient international

tribunals, it is not a reason for embracing pacifism or declining to fight in the cause of righteousness.

In the national sphere we have advanced considerably in efficiency in the administration of justice compared to the early days when it was left to 'the avenger of blood' to vindicate righteousness, but force still remains the final sanction. In the international sphere we have not made much progress at all. The way of progress, however, is not by the denial of the rightness of war when it is the only way of vindicating righteousness, but by improving international institutions so that war, though remaining the final sanction, need be seldom, if ever, resorted to; and then limited war rather than total war.

❁ The rightness of any particular war and the rightness of the way it is waged are two distinct questions. These two questions have too often been confused. All war is horrid. So is an execution, so is life confinement in jail. But it may be our duty on occasion to inflict these judgments. If anyone delights in war he is sinning against God and is doing the very thing Christ corrected when he told his disciples, 'Love your enemies'. If we are to engage in war without sin we must strengthen our belief in the supernatural God.

We must answer the question of war conscious of our relationship to our revealed God who is the Judge of all. If we think of God only as the ground of our own being we will have lost the key of God's revelation as the guide to ultimate values in morality. Everything will be relative and our judgment will be swamped by undifferentiating sentimental 'love'. Love in the Scripture is holy love, which goes out to all people and treats all people as persons. But the very fact of treating them as persons, honouring them as persons, may mean accepting the awful responsibility delegated to you by God to give them what they deserve. At the last, as the Scriptures constantly reaffirm, God the righteous Judge will give to every man according to his works.

The Christian attitude to war means an attitude informed and based on revelation. In the Bible God has revealed his mind to us and has given us a pattern for our thinking, so that our task is to seek to understand that revelation, seek to verify it, seek to correct our interpretation of it but, nevertheless, to stand firm on it. This has always been the Christian point of view because, apart from revelation, we have only our own innate judgment as sole guide, whether garnering ideas from Confucius or from Christ, or from whomever it may be, on which to base that judgment.

The Old Testament is part of revelation. It forms by far the greater part of the Bible. It is the Bible Jesus had. When, for example, Jesus said to the Sadducees (*Matt. 22:31*): 'Have you never read what was spoken *to you* by God?' he showed that he took the written word of the Old Testament to be a contemporary word from God to the Sadducees. That was our Lord's attitude to the Old Testament and for this same reason we must use it, as I have done above, as the authoritative source from which we obtain our Christian attitude to war.

In the early church there was a heretic named Marcion who rejected the Old Testament which, he said, was the product of a God of justice, and confined himself to the New Testament which, he said, reflected a God of love. Modern Marcionites say that the Old Testament has been superseded by the revelation of a God of love; that the Old Testament is antiquated, so that they do not accept its point of view. The subject of war, like so many other subjects, faces us with a choice. Do we accept the revelation as Christ accepted it, seeking to understand the Old Testament in the light of the New and in unity with it, since all has been inspired by the one Spirit of God? Or are we going to be modern Marcionites, people who toss over the Old Testament and pick from the New the concepts we like, and model our religion on that? Popular though the latter view may be it has no right to the name of Christian.

15

Homosexuality

The Bible is very clear and explicit in its total condemnation of all homosexual behaviour. It does not deal with homosexual disposition, nor temptation, but speaks firmly about homosexual behaviour. One of the problems of discussing the subject is that the word 'homosexual' can refer to a disposition or it may refer to the overt actions. We are all tempted in the sphere of sex to think things and to do things which transgress the law of God; and some will find these temptations more pressing than others. But it is the outward expression and action to which I refer when using the word 'homosexuality'. On this the Bible is very clear.

In the Old Testament there are not many offences punishable by death but homosexuality is one of them (*Lev. 21:13; cf. Lev. 18:22*). This activity is condemned in several places in the Old Testament. The same condemnation is clearly repeated in the New Testament (*Rom. 1:27; 1 Cor. 6:9,10; 1 Tim. 1:9,10*); and homosexuality is listed by Paul among the actions which evoke the wrath of God. We conclude, then, that Christians who believe the Bible to be the Word of God can have no doubt whatever that homosexuality is against the mind of God and temptations to its expression are to be resisted, and those who engage in homosexual practices cannot please God.

The reason for this clear and severe condemnation of homosexuality in Holy Scripture is not difficult to find.

Homosexual behaviour can only be justified on the ground that sex does not belong to the realm of morality but is a free action, just as going for a swim is a free action, to be followed according to one's own discretion, without rules; so that choosing one form of sex or another is then like choosing what vegetable you have with your meal. It is without any moral significance. The homosexual can find no principle to guide his sexual actions other than the principle of wishing to engage in them. For example, the concept of fidelity to a partner is not a principle which the homosexual feels obliged to consider in his sexual life. It is true that he may prefer to continue with one partner, but it is not a principle. He will feel free to go off with someone else, even while he has a customary sexual relationship with one particular person.

Since the principle of fidelity in sex cannot be applied to homosexuality, no more can the concept of continence. For continence is a concept that derives from fidelity. Normal sexual morality expects that the principle of fidelity will be expressed in the context of continence. For example, if a husband or wife are temporarily separated they are not free to indulge in sexual relationships with anyone whom they may meet. Fidelity aims to support fellowship and is, in reality, a consideration of the other partner, as all true sex is. The homosexual, however, can make no sense of this concept of continence, for homosexual sex is essentially egocentric.

Homosexuality can be justified only if there are no principles or rules to govern the expression of sex, apart from the rules which govern all our actions, such as not injuring other people. If, on the other hand, sex has a purpose beyond pleasure, that is, an object to be achieved through sex, then sex will have rules to ensure the achieving of this purpose. For example, if the rule which governs the expression of sex is fidelity, homosexuality is excluded, for homosexuality can find no basis for this requirement of fidelity. The basis of homosexual sex is pleasure, and consequently the partner-

ships which may be formed are egocentric. They are not normally exclusive or permanent.

Thus, homosexuality can be approved only on the principle that sex does not, in itself, belong to the area of morality, but is an indifferent thing just like going for a swim, or any other pleasurable activity; and if, on the other hand, sex expression is to be governed by morality, and if fidelity within sexual relationships, with the concomitant concept of continence when it is not possible to experience sex within these relationships, is the true principle for sexual expression, then homosexuality must be condemned root and branch. It is not surprising, therefore, that God's Word guides us unerringly to this conclusion.

Homosexuality (and bestiality) are the ultimate expressions of the view that sex is only for pleasurable experiences and that there are no rules to apply to sexual behaviour to restrict our sexual actions other than the general rules which govern all our actions, such as not hurting other people.

If homosexual behaviour is morally permissible it is a contradiction to suggest that children should be protected.

Homosexual behaviour cannot be condoned without destroying the basis of sexual morality *in toto*. It would mean the abolition of marriage (as we know it) and with this the abolition of the home and of the life-long companionship which is based on the principle of fidelity, for (even though this principle may be transgressed) without this principle it is impossible to maintain a life-long relationship. The joys and pleasures of married life (including the sexual pleasures) grow with the growing together of the personalities. This growth in fellowship and so in pleasure would be impossible if sexual behaviour were not rooted in moral principles. No wonder God's Word warns us against homosexuality, which, if indulged in, would destroy all the blessings which God has for us through sex.

Fellowship between persons – men, women and God – is

the purpose of this life and of eternity. Fellowship and self-centredness are contradictions. Sex is for fellowship and fidelity in sex is essential if sex is to serve this purpose of fellowship. This means that sex must be exercised within rules which aim to serve this purpose. That is, sex has its own morality and is not outside morality (or non-moral) as the supporters of homosexuality must maintain.

Fidelity is the principle which should govern sexual behaviour. Right at the beginning of the Bible God makes this clear. The married man is to leave his father and mother and cleave to his wife and they are to become one. Fidelity carries with it the concomitant principle of continence in certain circumstances. If fidelity is the principle on which sex is to be based the procreation of children is the specific purpose of sex. This is clear, not only from the characteristics of our bodies, but also from the Word of God (see Lk. 20:35-6). But it is not the only or indeed the ultimate purpose, for again, at the beginning of Scripture, we learn that marriage is instituted for companionship (*Gen. 2:18*). Companionship springs out of fidelity and sexual relations both deepen and express companionship. But it is the companionship of one man and one woman for a life-time. This is the Christian doctrine of marriage, based on the moral principles expressed in Scripture. Human marriage is modelled on, and expresses, God's relationship to his people in Christ. Here, again, the principle of relationship is fidelity; God is faithful and we are to be faithful to him.

The Old Testament is absolutely clear that God abominates homosexual acts. Leviticus 20:13 states that 'if a man lie with a male as with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination: they shall be put to death; their blood is upon them'. Similarly Leviticus 18:22 says, 'You shall not lie with a male as with a woman; it is an abomination'; and Deuteronomy 23:17 adds, 'There shall be no harlot of the daughters of Israel, neither shall there be a

sodomite of the sons of Israel. You shall not bring the hire of a whore or the wages of a sodomite into the house of the Lord your God for any vow: for both these are an abomination unto the Lord your God'.

The Old Testament consistently condemns sodomy, but some people say that the New Testament is different and contrast the teaching of Jesus with that of the God of the Old Testament. This sort of contrast springs from a lack of knowledge. Jesus believed every word of the Old Testament, and he spoke of the God revealed there as his Father. And if we read the New Testament we will find that it affirms in every respect the teaching of the Old Testament and, in fact, on this particular question, it is even more explicit in its condemnation. Thus in Romans 1:27 we read, 'Men . . . were consumed in passion for one another, men committing shameless acts with men and receiving in their own persons the due penalty for their error . . . who, though they know God's decree that those who do such things deserve to die, not only do them but also approve those who practise them'. In 1 Timothy 1:9-10 'the law is made for the lawless and unruly, for the ungodly and sinners . . . for fornicators, for abusers of themselves with men'.

Perhaps the clearest condemnation of homosexuality in the New Testament is in 1 Corinthians 6:9: 'Do you not know that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither the immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals . . . shall inherit the kingdom of God'. We should be clear, then, that God's Word consistently condemns homosexual activity. It follows that those who deliberately and unrepentantly engage in it cannot expect to be in relationship with God through his Holy Spirit. They cannot, that is, be Christians. They may say that they are but the facts are against them. God will not dwell in the hearts of those who set their face to do what his Word plainly and consistently forbids.

There is a second point. Christians are commanded by the Word of God not to have fellowship with those who call themselves Christians but who, at the same time, refuse to follow God's will. God does not have fellowship with the deliberately disobedient, and we are not to enter into Christian fellowship with them either. I am not talking about fellowship with non-Christians, that is about people who do not claim the name of Christ, but about those who take the name of Christ and yet refuse to follow the will of God as Christ followed it. From these we are to withdraw our fellowship. Thus Paul says in 1 Corinthians 5:11: 'I write unto you not to keep company, if any man who is named a brother (i.e. a Christian) be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or an extortioner; with such a one do not eat'. There are other passages in the New Testament to the same effect. It is therefore plain that a Christian church cannot have, as one of its office bearers, someone who is avowedly living contrary to Scripture. If we are to be faithful to God's mind we are to break off our Christian fellowship with such a person. The homosexual is not especially singled out. The same is true for anyone who is breaking God's law, whether he is a thief or living with someone else's wife.

Some people say that this is a form of moral persecution. It is nothing of the sort. It is simply obedience to Christ; people should not expect otherwise. Of course the church exists to help people with problems and the problem of homosexuality can be overcome, since it is not an inherited but an acquired disposition. For someone who feels he has this disposition but is fighting against it, nothing but sympathy and help should be forthcoming from all of us. But for those who are advocating it as a way of life in the name of Christ, such teaching must be corrected by the plain Word of God, and Christian fellowship withdrawn until a change of mind and lifestyle takes place.

Thirdly, why are homosexual acts abominable in God's sight? In a 'nut-shell', because homosexuality is the expression of the concept that the enjoyment of sex is essentially self-centred. Lots of things we enjoy are self-centred, and harmless at that, such as surfing and horse-riding. Advocates of homosexuality are, in effect, saying that sex is the same. But the truth is the exact opposite. Sex is essentially relationship, while self-centredness is, of course, the complete absence of relationship. Therefore it is an abuse of sex to use it self-centredly. The Bible puts the matter in a 'nut-shell' when it says that our sexual natures may only be unlocked by our spouse. We have no authority over them ourselves. It may seem a strange thing when Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 7:4, 'The wife has no authority over her own body, but the husband: and likewise also the husband has no authority over his own body, but the wife'. But these words reflect a very important truth that human nature is made for fellowship, and that sex lies close to the centre of this purpose. Sex is for relationship, while homosexuality is the complete antithesis of this for, in fact, it is saying that sex is for self-satisfaction.

In 1 Corinthians 6:13 there is an interesting contrast between our physical organs which come to an end, and our body, which will be raised up with Christ. It is plain that Paul is thinking of the body as more than the sum of the physical organs. It is the expression of our personality. And so our use of sex is never merely a physical function, it is the expression of our personality in our relationship with our spouse. We express our relationship of love and joy in each other's company through our bodies. It is a wonderful mystery which God has woven into creation.

The same passage makes clear that our relationship with one another should be in the context of our relationship with Christ. As Paul says, the body is for the Lord and the Lord for the body. Sex helps to unite persons. We as persons are,

of course, related and united to one another through our minds and spirits, and this is expressed and strengthened through our mutual use of our bodies. We are created for relationship and, therefore, our bodies are to express relationship. But true relationships can exist only if they are 'other-person-centred'; self-centredness destroys relationship. That is why we are not to use our sexual natures selfishly and self-centredly. Nor, as Paul points out, are we to use our sexual nature for a casual relationship with a prostitute. This, too, is self-centred. We are not to take our bodies (that is to say, the expression of our personalities) and unite them sexually with a harlot and so become one with her in this casual, mercenary relationship (*1 Cor. 6:16*).

All relationship is other-person-centred, and this is true of a husband and wife relationship which becomes deeper than other human relationships by being exclusive, permanent and intimate. Sex does not create this relationship, which, like all human relationship, is based in the mind and personality, but sex expresses and serves this relationship. Our sexual natures have been created to express life-long relationship with our spouse and so the principle of sex is fidelity. That is to say, our spouse alone has authority over our bodies in their sexual expression.

Paul concludes this passage with a reminder that we have been purchased for God through the death of Christ. We ourselves and our bodies are his, for Christ died for us and God himself dwells in our bodies with his Spirit; and our bodies, that is to say ourselves and our total personality, are part of Christ. So that all relationships with other people are to be included in this relationship that we have with God through his Spirit in Christ, being united with him and therefore part of his body, being one body with him, one in personal relationship, just as husband and wife are one body, one in heart and soul.

Human sexuality is modelled, according to the Scripture,

on this wonderful relationship that we have with God in Christ. Homosexuality, however, in its essence, simply uses sex in a self-centred way, and so runs against the whole of God's purpose in creating us, our personalities and our bodies, for relationship with God in Christ. Sex expresses and is the instrument of this purpose. No wonder homosexuality, which contradicts this purpose in an area of its intended expression, is abominated in God's Word. God has, moreover, written this condemnation of homosexuality into our natural instincts. The literature of the non-Christian world witnesses to this fact.

God will strengthen those who look to him for help against this temptation as he does in every temptation. We should be clear in our minds that it is something which is essentially wrong and to be avoided in our own lives and in the life of our Christian fellowship.

16

Abortion

Abortion is the deliberate terminating of human life, so it is a question of great importance and seriousness. Life is a process. Every day we are a little different from what we were the day before. And at every stage of that process we are dependent on others. I am not thinking here about our dependence on God, which is fundamental, though so often we forget it and so many people do not even acknowledge it at all. But I am thinking about our dependence on one another and the obligations and responsibilities that this dependence creates. Take the case of the very old person, no longer able to earn his own living or even, perhaps, to look after himself physically. He is dependent on other people for his food, for his housing, for his nursing. This dependence creates obligations on those who are able to help.

Have we a right to wash our hands of these obligations? In some pagan societies the answer has been 'yes', and the old are just abandoned to die. But Christianity has taught us that we have obligations to those who are dependent on us, to the old and to the sick, and we are not to get out from under the burden by terminating the burdensome life, but rather we are to provide for such individuals. It is Christianity which brought into being alms houses and old age homes, and it is Christianity that brought into being hospitals for the care of the sick by those who are well. Or take the other end of human life. The young child is dependent

on its parents for many years. This is the way God has made human life.

Those two principles of human life apply from the very beginning, from the moment of conception. The first principle is that life is a process with change from day to day from conception to death. The whole of that process is the same human life. And the second principle is that, throughout this process, there is always the unchanging principle of dependence on others. This dependence is more obvious at some periods of life, but it is always there. It is very obvious in the early stages of life. A foetus in its mother's womb is plainly dependent upon its mother for all its sustenance and it is dependent also on its mother for that care which will later ensure its safe delivery and birth. Birth does not bring about any drastic change in this state of dependence. The unborn infant, living in its mother's womb, is plainly dependent on its mother but so, also, is the newborn babe, hanging on its mother's breast, needing its mother's care for the survival of its life and her affection for its proper development.

This state of dependence on other people goes on throughout life. Even in adulthood, when we appear to be at our most independent stage, we are, in fact, dependent on one another for affection, appreciation, support, as well as help for earning our daily food. And as the process of life goes on our dependence becomes more obvious, once again, as old age diminishes our powers of self-support.

This state of dependence calls out obligations from those among whom we live. This is the way God has made our life. We are bound up one with the other. The obligations which others have towards us and we towards them are mutual. Put the other way round, we may say that we all have rights which are not to be denied by others but are to be observed and guarded. Applying this to the question of abortion we should ask: 'What are the rights that the growing human life

has while still in its mother's womb? What are our obligations to it?' One of the most fundamental rights of human nature is the right to life and this right is not to be abrogated by others and our life taken away from us, except for the gravest causes.

The growing foetus shares in this right to life. It has claims on our obligations, just as other human life has, and we have duties towards it. Most of us would recognise straight away that a mother has a duty towards her newborn babe, but this duty does not suddenly begin at the moment of birth, for life is a process and goes right back to the beginning of that life. Similarly, most of us would recognise that society, through its laws, has the obligation to secure the right to life of a newborn baby, although, as yet, it has no self-consciousness or knowledge of its rights. To kill the newborn babe is murder and is punishable as such through our laws. We recognise that society has this obligation to protect the rights of the newborn, just as the mother has the obligation to care for that child. And just as the mother's obligation of care antedates the birth of her child and goes right back to the moment of its conception, so, too, we should recognise that the obligation of the state does not begin suddenly with the birth of the child but goes back to the beginning of the process of life, so that the state has an obligation to protect, by its laws, the unborn child, just as it has the obligation to protect the newly born.

This obligation of the parents and of the community towards the child growing in the womb is widely denied in some quarters today by the argument that a mother has a right to do what she likes with her body; and has no obligations towards the growing life. It is argued that the foetus in the womb is to be regarded in the same light as any other part of the mother's body; just as she trims her finger nails so she can have an abortion. Such was the argument which led to the demand that abortion be legalised, as though

neither mother nor community had any obligation to protect the growing life within the womb.

These ideas are simply the revival of the concepts of pagan society, for example those of ancient Greece. The essence of Greek ethics was the isolation of the individual against obligation and relationships with others which make demands upon him, or which could influence or affect him. Greek stoicism isolates one from another, but Christian ethics unite us in love and, therefore, in obligation.

Although this stark position has only recently taken hold in our community there are lots of Christians who, unconsciously, have adopted its premise and who argue that the foetus may be killed, that is, that the abortion is allowable, if not at the absolute discretion of the mother yet in a wide variety of circumstances which are not viewed in relation to the right of the foetus to life, or what our obligations are towards the foetus. For example, some say it is right to kill the foetus if you think it is going to be deformed. The Greeks used to kill newborn infants for the same reason, but what right have we to kill the newly-born or the not-yet-born simply because of some deformity? The Nazis accepted this principle and killed the Jews simply because they were Jews. Have we the right to kill the foetus because we think it may be deformed? Or what shall we say when science predicts the sex of the child? Will we kill the foetus because, for example, we may not want another girl? Others think that the mother has a right to terminate the life of the foetus if it would be distasteful for her to bear the child. Sometimes, of course, the question here may be very delicate, as in the case of conception following rape. But, here again, the starting point must be. 'What are our obligations to the life that has come into being? And what is the mother's obligation to the life which is dependent on her?'

The question is not an easy one and we must give thought to just what our obligations are towards human life growing

towards fruition. But it must be remembered that we are not justified in washing our hands of our obligations just because of the difficulty of the circumstances which surround our discharge of these obligations. God is in charge of circumstances, for he is sovereign, and he has promised that he will not allow our circumstances to develop beyond what we can bear, if we are trusting in him and doing his will. On the other hand society certainly has a very strong obligation to assist in alleviating the burden that family obligations impose. We recognise this by society providing free hospitalisation for the poor, child endowment to help parents and many other benefits. We have not done enough to help parents of defective children. This is where we need to give attention rather than enact laws which allow that children who may, perhaps, be born defective, have their lives terminated before birth.

There is, however, one situation in which it is lawful to terminate someone else's life, and that is when that other is an aggressor. For example, if a man is in the act of murdering another person he has already forfeited his right to life, so that, if his victim shoots him in self-defence, he has not acted immorally or committed any crime. And this is true whether the would-be murderer is in his right mind or whether he is crazy and does not know what he is doing. He has forfeited his right to life because he has become an aggressor, threatening the life of another.

The same consideration applies to the foetus; if, through physical circumstances, it is threatening the antecedent life of its mother, it has, in this way, forfeited its own right to be allowed to continue to live; not that it is morally responsible any more than, for example, a crazed madman threatening someone else with a revolver is morally responsible, but in both cases it is not wrong if the only way to preserve the threatened life is by taking away the life of the aggressor; in fact it is our duty to do so. This means

that abortion is morally right if it is necessary to save the life of the mother.

It is to be regretted that there are professing Christians who do not recognise this category of real, although unconscious, aggression of the foetus against the life of its mother. As a consequence they find themselves put in the position of saying that the mother must be allowed to die rather than the life of the foetus be directly taken away. But this is an impossible position, as most people recognise, and the reason why it is mistaken is that it has failed to take into account the fact that the foetus, when it threatens the life of its mother, has itself lost its own right to life. Of course it is unconscious and does not come within the rules of morality but, nevertheless, our obligation to allow it to continue its life ceases when the foetus itself is a threat to the life of another. But unless there is a threat against another we have an obligation towards the life of the foetus, just as we have an obligation towards all human life, whether the life of the aged or of the lunatic or of the Jew in Nazi Germany. It is not for us to take away the right to life unless this right has been forfeited by aggression. The inconvenience and expense of maintaining the aged or the lunatic or the deformed is no argument to support their killing, though it is a very strong claim on society to assist so that the burden that these obligations involve should be shared more equitably.

The same consideration applies to the life not yet born. The unborn child, lying in its mother's womb a few hours before birth, is not to be killed, any more than the newborn child of an hour or two hanging on its mother's breast. The same immunity extends back to the beginning of the process of life right to the point of conception. Human life, from its very beginning, involves others in obligations towards it. Put another way, this means that human life has rights and the fundamental right is the right to be allowed to live. The foetus participates in this right to life; even for the foetus its

right to be allowed to live is not automatically forfeited because of possible deformity or inconvenience which it may involve others in, though it is forfeited if its coming into being endangers the lives of others. The law of nations ought to reflect these distinctions. The agitation to change the law on abortion was successful, in part, because Christians did not give their minds to understanding and maintaining the principles involved.

The Women's Liberation Movement uses the argument that we have a right to do whatever we want with our own bodies and, from that, draws the conclusion that women have the right to have abortions if they choose. But the statement is wrong, although it may seem, on the surface, correct. We do not have a right to do what we like with our bodies because they are not ours in the first place. We did not make them; they were given to us when we were given life, and we have got to use our bodies in accordance with the purpose for which they were given to us. If we do not we will, in effect, be embezzling a trust. We will have to give an account and pay the penalty on the Judgment Day, and go to prison for embezzlement, just like anybody who embezzles a trust fund has to down here.

Our bodies have been given to us by our Creator to use in the service of other people. For Christians, there is a further strong reason: our Saviour has bought us back from the destruction for which we were headed, so that doubly we are not our own: we have been bought, as well as created, to be the servants of our Saviour and Lord.

We must use our bodies for the purpose they were given. We may gather what this purpose is by reflection on human life, but we gather it much more quickly by going to the manufacturer's manual, as it were. Our Creator has explained his purpose for our life in the Bible. That is his Word, it is the manual. There we learn a very interesting thing about our bodies, namely that the sexual side of our bodies is for the

purpose of relationship, to relate ourselves to our spouse. Sexual deviants are self-centred and we are not to be self-centred, especially in the use of our sexual nature, for it is given to us to express and strengthen the personal relationship of marriage. So it is wrong to say that our bodies are our own to do what we like with and, consequently, the argument that abortion is therefore justified is wrong.

In fact it is doubly wrong, for not only are our bodies not for selfish use but the embryo in the womb is not part of its mother's body. It is another body distinct from its mother's, and it is not simply a part of its mother's body like an appendix or a toe. This is clear when we remember that all the cells of its mother's body have the same genetic code, whether the cells are in the appendix or the toe or any other part of the body, but all the cells of the foetus have quite a different genetic code from the cells of its mother's body. It is human life in its own right.

Certainly it is being protected and nourished by its mother's body, but it is not simply a part of its mother's body as though its mother could do what she likes with her own body. Once the sexual embrace has been willingly accepted and conception takes place the point of decision has been passed. Only if the embryo is an invader or is threatening its mother, can it be attacked. Otherwise it ought to be protected.

Motives for Christian Living

All those who believe that God is the Judge of the world, and that their lives will come, in due course, under his searching scrutiny, are naturally interested in the question of how that verdict will go and what principles will be applied at that judgment bar. These are matters of the utmost importance and of very great relevance for they vitally affect our future happiness. With regard to them we need to know both the standards which God will apply to our lives and his estimate of our present situation. It is not our opinion but God's that counts here.

The Bible gives clear answers on both these matters. About our present state it says quite clearly that we come far short of God's requirement. As sinners who disobey God's will (which we know in our hearts) we are under condemnation and, further, the Bible makes clear that God's standard, which he requires and by which he will judge us, is perfection. God commanded Abraham, 'Walk before me and be thou perfect', and our Lord Jesus told his disciples that they were to be perfect as their heavenly Father was perfect. This is what we might expect, for heaven is a place of perfection.

If the Scripture had nothing further to say we would be in a very desperate situation, for who can arrive at God's standard of perfection? But the Bible is not only a book of law, setting standards – and these the very highest; it is chiefly a book of

salvation. Not only does God's Word condemn us as sinners who come short of God's standard, but it also brings us the promise that whoever repents and believes in the Lord Jesus Christ will be forgiven completely, however far short he may come.

So the measure of our attainment of God's perfect standard is not the vital question with regard to God's judgment but rather, how we stand with regard to God's offer of forgiveness in Christ, whether it has been accepted by us or not. If we have been forgiven, all our sins and shortcomings, great or small, are covered by the salvation in Christ. But if we still are outside that salvation then there is no hope, for God's standard is perfection and even our best efforts cannot attain to this.

Paul puts the matter very well in the opening verses of Ephesians 2. He says, 'You were dead spiritually through your transgressions and sins, when you followed the lusts of the flesh and of the mind and were by nature children of wrath; yet God, for the sake of his great love towards us, made us alive with Christ and made us to sit with Christ in heaven, in order that, in the ages to come, he might show the riches of his grace in his kindness towards us in Christ Jesus'. This salvation is the gift of God from beginning to end. Paul adds, 'By grace have you been saved, through faith, and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God, not of works'.

This gift of salvation is not the reward of our moral efforts or of our endeavours to turn over a new leaf, but is given freely by God for Christ's sake to all who truly desire it, who are truly sorry for their sins and turn from them to God, asking that his promise of forgiveness might be true in their case and acknowledging that Jesus is their Saviour and Lord. You will see then that our duty to live the Christian life follows as a consequence of the high privilege to which God has called us. Because we *are* his sons by his free and gracious adoption we ought, as a consequence, to live as sons; because

he has given us heaven to be our inheritance we ought to live in a heavenly-minded way, and this is what Paul says in Ephesians 4:1, 'I beseech you to live worthily of the calling wherewith ye are called'.

We do not live the good life in order to merit or earn heaven, for heaven is ours already by gift, through the merits of Christ. But we have a much more powerful motive for living the Christian life, the motive of thankfulness, which binds us in love to follow the will of our Saviour as closely as we can. His will is that we should reflect and pass on his love which we have received, by loving our fellows. Thus Paul says, 'Owe no man anything but to love one another, for love sums up the whole of God's law' (*Rom. 13:8*).

This duty to act in a loving manner towards our neighbour is an absolute obligation, more absolute than we are ever able to fulfil this side of heaven. Paul demands, 'Be ye imitators of Christ'. This is not just counsel, but a command to imitate the perfectness of Christ. God approves of nothing less. But when we come short of this standard of perfection then forgiveness intervenes, and in the consciousness of God's loving forgiveness we endeavour once more to show forth his character in our lives by acting in every circumstance as true love would direct.

One of the most profound points that divides professing Christians from one another is this question of the place of good works as a means of earning heaven. Some mistakenly insist that we obtain salvation, not by faith in the death of Christ only but also by our own fulfilling of God's commandments. This doctrine of salvation by the merits of our own works leads, inevitably, to the lowering of our estimate of God's standards and of what God asks of us. It can no longer be perfection, for no-one could possibly enter heaven on such conditions; but it must be thought of as something which can be reasonably attained. Thus one theologian, G. H. Joyce, writing in *The Dictionary of Religion and Ethics* (volume 10,

page 350), says, 'A man is not bound to adopt the more perfect course in all his actions' as this is 'too burdensome for flesh and blood'. Similarly Henry Davis, in *Moral and Pastoral Theology* (5th ed., volume 1, page 199) explains that, when our Lord counselled acts of great virtue he was not really giving direct commands, for 'men could not possibly live up to that level'.

The Bible, however, commands perfection – 'Walk before me and be thou perfect', or again, 'Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and thy neighbour as thyself'. This remains our duty, though none of us fulfils it in this life as we should. But we must not think that God lowers his standards to what we can achieve. Our duty always remains the same, to love God and our neighbour perfectly as Christ did.

A lowering of this standard is, of course, required for the theory that we earn our way to heaven, for unless it is lowered none could get there. But the true doctrine of the Scripture is that Christ has earned our way to heaven; he has fulfilled perfectly all God's commands, and his perfections become ours by way of gift. God's standards are not lowered but are perfectly fulfilled by Jesus, and Jesus Christ's perfection becomes ours by God's gift to everyone who asks.

A second consequence of the doctrine that we win our way to heaven partly by our own meritorious actions is that selfishness becomes the principle of the Christian life, for it is our own salvation that we then have principally in view when we do good and kind things. Yet with such an attitude of selfishness it is not really possible to live a truly Christian life at all, that is to be Christ-like, for his life was complete unselfishness. Christ did not lead his life of perfect love to win heaven for himself, for heaven was already his. As Christians we are called upon to follow Christ and to live as he did. But selfishness can only be excluded when we realise quite definitely that our Christian life is not for the purpose of

winning heaven but because God has already made us his sons and given us heaven. Because of this we seek to show forth his character as Father by perfect love, as far as we are able, and so to glorify him, just as our Lord Jesus did.

We have seen that the doctrine of justification by works leads to a lowering of our estimate of God's standard. This, in turn, leads directly to conclusions which appear to the average man as less than moral. This is the direct result of relaxing God's standard of perfection as a requirement from all, in particular, relaxing the standard and requirement of perfect love as exemplified in Jesus Christ. Various illustrations could be given here. One is found in the doctrine of probabilism, as expounded by Henry Davis, who states (*Moral and Pastoral Theology* vol. 1, p. 78) that, when we are in doubt as to what action is right, if there are sound reasons for thinking that what we want to do is not wrong we may do it with a good conscience, although there are 'better, sounder and more cogent reasons' for thinking that it is wrong. If love is the rule of our conduct, as Paul commands, then there is no scope for this theory of probabilism, for we are never in any real doubt as to what is the more loving action, and we are absolutely bound by the law of love.

All who think that salvation is the result of our own moral efforts (and such persons are not confined to any one denomination) are forced to this conclusion, for if the law of love is absolutely binding no-one could go to heaven through his own merits for none could fulfil it.

But the scriptural way out of the dilemma is simple. Christ has fulfilled all God's laws including the absolute law of love, for he lived a life of perfect love and his fulfilment is counted to us by way of gift. It is on Christ's merits that we go to heaven, yet we are still bound to fulfil God's law of love, for the standard has not been altered. With the help of the Holy Spirit, we must strive after this to the best of our ability. But where we fail forgiveness covers our shortcomings. We are

not condemned on our standard of attainment, but forgiven through our relationship to Christ, and although our actions are not the basis of our salvation they are the means through which we glorify God, who loved us. So love must be our rule of conduct.

‘What is There For Us?’ Eternal Life!

The apostle Peter once asked Jesus a very direct and modern question: ‘What is there in it for us?’ (*Matt. 19:27*).

This is the sort of question that is often at the bottom of our minds – if not on our lips – ‘What is there in it for us?’

Peter and his fellow apostles had been following Jesus for two years or more. They had given up their homes and families; they had given up their income, their comfort, their worldly prospects, and so far it had not led anywhere. We may detect a glance back to the old life in Peter’s question, ‘Look, we have left everything. What is there in it for us?’ This is the sort of question that, once the flush of first enthusiasm wanes, is often asked by Christians, especially by full-time ministers, as Peter and the apostles were.

We can trace the way Peter was thinking by recalling the situation and the incidents which led up to the question. A young man had come to Jesus to ask him how he might inherit eternal life. The young man was rich, he owned a good deal of land and property – this would be reflected in his dress – and it brought him the social status and influence in the community which money and property normally ensured.

Our Lord’s reply was first to direct the young man to think again about the implications of coming to Jesus with his question about eternal life. He had addressed Jesus as ‘Good

Master' and our Lord replied, 'Why do you call *me* good? Only God is good'. Jesus stressed the word 'me' because, doubtless, he wanted to draw the man's attention to what was actually happening in his environment – the Son of God was present, according to the promises of the Old Testament. God himself had become man; the eternal Father was with us, as Isaiah had foretold.

This fact made the world take on a quite different aspect. God was in the world bringing about his purposes. This made the possession of wealth, comfort and power a good deal less important, once this fact was realised; and so Jesus directed the young man's thoughts to this question first – 'Why do you call me good?' Our Lord's final advice to him was simple, 'Follow me'.

But this would involve, as it did for the apostles, abandoning his worldly prospects. Jesus said, 'Go and sell what you have and give to the poor and you will have treasure in heaven'. Notice the practicality of our Lord's advice. There was no sentimentality or impractical idealism. The young man would lose nothing because Jesus added, 'You will have treasure in heaven'.

The young man had come with the question as to how he could enter the kingdom of heaven. Since he believed in heaven he was told to transfer his assets there as the first step. God would not be in his debt. 'You shall have treasure in heaven', Jesus said. Then Jesus came to the main point: 'Come and follow me. Keep me company. That is the way to eternal life'.

The young man could not bring himself to do this, much as he would have liked to from one point of view. He went away sorrowful, back to his property, back to his comfort, back to his status, back to his worldly prospects. The present, which, in his case, meant comfort, power and prestige was too attractive. The other, too dim to his faith.

It was at this juncture, as the man walked away, that Peter

asked his question. 'Look', he said to Jesus, 'We have left everything. What is there in it for us?'

Who was the fool? The young man going back or the young men sticking with Jesus? In his reply Jesus was outspoken and explicit. He said very plainly that when God's purposes were completed in the regeneration of the world, the apostles would have their reward: they would sit on the twelve thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel – all the prestige one could want.

Of course, when the time really comes we will not want that kind of prestige, but Jesus spoke in language that Peter could understand. In brief, Jesus reminded Peter of the truth of the gospel which is, quite simply, that God's kingdom will certainly come. It is the pearl that is worth everything else.

It had, indeed, already come in the person of Jesus, but there is still a future completion when God's rule will be made plain. There will be a regeneration of the world when wrong will be set right and sin and evil judged, punished and banished; there will be a judgment when the wheat will be separated from the chaff. This was already in process with the presence of Jesus. God had come into the world and was grappling with and defeating evil.

The call of the gospel is to believe these things, to believe that Jesus is Lord, and his Word is to be trusted and obeyed. There is plenty of evidence to support our faith. The rich young ruler had the evidence of Jesus' life and miracles: the sick healed, the dead raised, evil spirits expelled, a perfect teacher. We have these and more, especially the resurrection and the presence of the Holy Spirit. When we are tempted to look back and to ask the question, 'What is there in it for us?' we are to take our eyes off the temporary – the world and its affluence – and to see the eternal and live by that, to make Jesus the centre of our lives, as he is the centre of the world because he is God manifested in the flesh not as an isolated event but the proof that the kingdom of God will be the most

real thing in our experience. The rich young ruler turned back to his money and his comfort and his prestige and his power. They lasted for only another fifty years at the most; what will he think about it in the day of the regeneration?

Jesus concluded his answer to Peter by widening it to include everyone who has left anything for Jesus' sake and for the sake of the gospel. 'There is no-one . . .', he said, ' . . . who has left his house, or his brothers, or sisters or parents, or property for my sake and for the gospel who will not receive one hundredfold now in this present life and in the age to come everlasting life'. In this down-to-earth reply there is no call for asceticism and the giving up of things for its own sake. Jesus has said that we will receive, in this life, more than we have given up, in the very form of the things given up: houses, brothers, sisters, parents, children, fields.

God has made this world to be enjoyed and he intends us to enjoy life day by day as it comes along. We are to enjoy God's world and to thank him for it and for the joys he gives us in it but without setting our hearts on it, so that we will not refuse if the call to follow Jesus as Lord involves us in losing these things. Our eyes are not to be fixed on the things of this world but on the kingdom of God and its rewards.

Jesus added that those who followed him may also expect persecution. This is because we live in a world dominated by evil. We must expect persecution if we are going to seek first God's kingdom and live by the scale of values that this involves, for we will be out of step with the rest, with those who value first worldly affluence, prestige and power. But, nevertheless, if we follow Christ we have the promise that, in this world, God gives us richly all things to enjoy, but with persecutions, as was the experience of all the apostles. Yet God's care for us and our fellowship with him never fails, so that, in the coming age when God's kingdom will reach its culmination, we will inherit eternal life, the fulness of fellowship with God.

The gospel is simply a statement of the facts of the case, namely that the kingdom of God is at hand; and the call of the gospel is to repent and believe it. It is a call to change our attitude to life and our values, to base them on the truth of the gospel, that Jesus Christ is Lord.

What we modern Christians need, and what the church today needs, is a revivification and renewed adoption of the world view that the gospel puts before us. We need to preach the gospel, the facts of reality; we need to repent, that is, change our minds and believe the gospel. Otherwise, the question obtrudes itself in our minds, 'Are we making fools of ourselves in giving up the obvious advantages of the present and perhaps suffering persecution as Christians? What is there in it for us?'

When we ask this question, unless we have a firm grip of the gospel, we will find ourselves, in actual fact, giving the answer that the young ruler gave. But those twelve thrones are real. The judgment day is true. Reality is God. And the gospel is, as Paul told his audience in Acts 17, 'God commands men that they should all, everywhere, change their minds about him, inasmuch as he has appointed a day in which he will judge the world in righteousness by the man whom he has ordained, whereof he has given assurance to everyone in that he has raised him from the dead' (*Acts 17:30-31*).

As we live by the light of this truth we find ourselves in fellowship with God, and this is eternal life.

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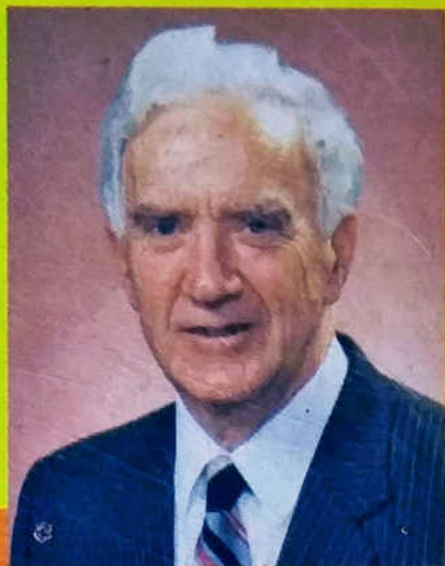
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NOT BY BREAD ALONE

God's Word on Present Issues

DAVID BROUGHTON KNOX



Man cannot live by bread alone says Jesus. When stated so simply and starkly this truth seems obvious; yet so much of late twentieth-century life underlines how often it is ignored. Society lies in the grip of a mind - set which sees man as the measure of all things. This fundamental lack of perspective affects his whole life and means that he can never see the real answer to his own deepest problems.

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Dr Broughton Knox was for many years Principal of Moore Theological College, Sydney, Australia. Now in official retirement he is actively serving in the newly-founded George Whitefield College in Kalk Bay, South Africa.

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